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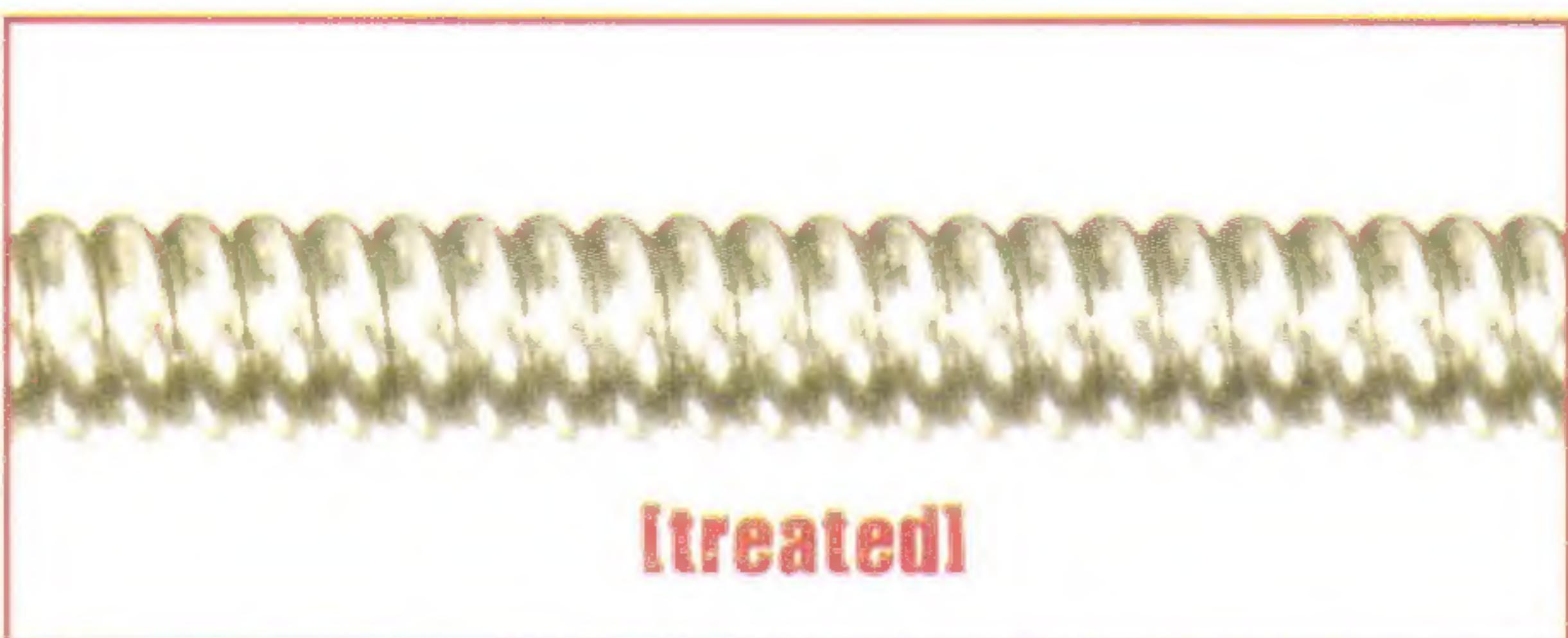
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GAMES

12 The History of *Guitar Hero*

Crazy deadlines! Broken guitars! Raging keggers! Walt Disney World! Behind the scenes of the rise and rise of gaming's most powerful franchise.

22 *Guitar Hero Gets Real*

Form your own band. Write your own music. Rock the world. With sophisticated songwriting tools and pro-grade technology at its core, the upcoming *Guitar Hero: World Tour* isn't just playing games anymore.

28 *Rock Band 2: First Look*

A sneak preview of the upcoming sequel to *Rock Band*; plus the entire track listing!

32 The Real Guide to Fake Guitar

Wouldn't you like to be better at *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*? Here's the stuff every budding shredder needs to know to be a better phony guitarist.

38 Where Do *Rock Band* Songs Come From?

"Dude, you know what song I want to see in *Rock Band*?" Actually, yes. Harmonix does know. But turning wishes into reality takes a little work.

44 Turning Japanese

There was guitar gaming before *Guitar Hero* – but unless you were living in Japan, you probably never realized it. Here's what you missed.

46 Conquer *Guitar Hero III!*

Can't seem to conquer Lou in the final duel? We'll show you how – beating the devil is in the details.

52 *Guitar Gaming Cheats*

Who says practice is the only way to the top? Armed with these cheat codes, you can bend *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* to your will – or, if you've already beaten the game, have some fun screwing around.



GUITARISTS

64 Just Push Play

As *Guitar Hero* rolls out its special Aerosmith edition, guitarist Joe Perry talks about the virtues of the virtual guitar game and why it's not the same old song and dance.

68 Lose Your Illusion

Velvet Revolver's Slash was transformed into a virtual hero for guitar wannabes in *Guitar Hero III*. But he finds that winning the game—like becoming a real *Guitar Hero*—takes more than a little patience.

72 The Real Heroes

Every killer track in *Guitar Hero & Rock Band* starts with an equally killer recording. Meet the players and producers who make the music behind the magic.

80 A Hero in the Making

The smash hit videogame has raked in over \$1 billion to date, and with *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* available now, we decided it was time we met the six-string talent behind it, Marcus Henderson...

GEAR

86 Getting Into Gear

Whether you're a hardcore, high-scoring gamer, serious student of the six-string, or a bit of both, a little new equipment might be just what you need to reach the next level.

GUITAR BUYER'S GUIDE

92 How to Buy an Electric Guitar

94 How to Buy a Bass Guitar

96 How to Buy an Amp

98 How to Buy Strings



GUITARS ON GAMING

EDITORIAL

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BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE RISE AND RISE
OF GAMING'S MOST POWERFUL FRANCHISE.

» By Dan Amrich

The Gear

The Guitarists

THE GAMES ➤

13

Videogames are all about living out fantasies. Some people want to be space marines, defending the galaxy from ugly alien attackers. Others would rather be kung-fu masters – fast as lightning, with expert timing. And for some reason, an awful lot of people want to be short, fat plumbers. Whatever.

The cool people, however, want to be Jimi Hendrix. *Guitar Hero* is the game that makes that dream come true, somehow turning the simple act of pressing colored buttons on a plastic guitar into something fulfilling and epic. But *Guitar Hero*'s roots lie not in dreams of rock and roll excess but in a very noble goal: To make non-musicians feel the thrill of making music.

"When we started the company back in 1995, we actually weren't thinking about video games at all," says Alex Rigopulos, co-founder and CEO of *Guitar Hero* developer Harmonix. "We started the company not as a video game developer but as a music company. Making music is one of the most profoundly blissful experiences that life has to offer, and almost no one ever *really* gets to have that experience. Everybody tries to learn to play an instrument at some point in their lives, and almost all of those people quit after a few months or years, because it's just too hard. People don't have the time or talent or patience to slug it out and have these frustrating, unpleasant experiences for years before they really get the reward. My co-founder Eran Egozy and I found this to be a tragic problem in the world that we wanted to fix, so we started Harmonix originally to invent new ways for people to have access to this very special pleasure that comes from music-making." So, the pair took their MIT educations and set up shop not far from campus in downtown Boston.

The company's first product – *The Axe*, a PC program that let you use a joystick as a music controller – flopped. But it did land them a cool gig building the musical part of the Imagination pavilion at Walt Disney World's EPCOT Center. The creative playground attraction let visitors create music simply by breaking beams of light. "A kid could step up and start waving his hands in the air, and as he waved his hands more rapidly more notes would come out," explains Rigopulos.

"As he waved his hands up and down, the notes would rise and fall. So, long before we did games, we were focused on giving people these musical creative experiences."

But by the late 90s, Disney alone couldn't pay the bills. "We hadn't had a lot of business success at all up to that point, because there was no market for what we were trying to do," explains Rigopulos. "We also found that with our early free-form experiences, people had a great time with them for 30 minutes and then they had gotten what they wanted out of the experience." Meanwhile, in Japan, games like *Dance Dance Revolution*, *PaRappa the Rapper*, and *Beatmania* had started to combine music and interactivity in novel ways, giving players the chance to see if they could be a DJ, or a dancer, or... a hip-hop cartoon canine. Plus, they were insanely popular and raking in big bucks for game publishers like Sony and Konami. "That was a big 'a-ha' moment for us," says Rigopulos. "Games were really the medium where we could achieve what we were trying to achieve, because they gave structure, goals, and objective criteria to the act of music making. It was something that was mainstream accessible and a legitimate business. At that point it became apparent to us that that was the way to go forward."

The studio's first game was the lap-based *Frequency*, created for the *Epcot* station in 2000. It turns the three-dimensional tubes of the light-based *Imagination* game *Frequency*, with its 120 tracks, into a game that represents a different track of the music (drums, bass, synth, and so on). Hit the button sequences in time and you'll re-create the track, essentially mixing music on the fly. Sony liked it so much they published it themselves. *Frequency*'s 2003 sequel *Amplitude* featured more guitar-oriented tracks from bands like Weezer, Blink-182, Garbage, and P.O.D. Both games were critical hits, but not commercial ones. "That experience was a pret-



Guitar Hero

NOVEMBER 2005



PLATFORM: PS2

GUITAR CONTROLLER:

Gibson SG (black)

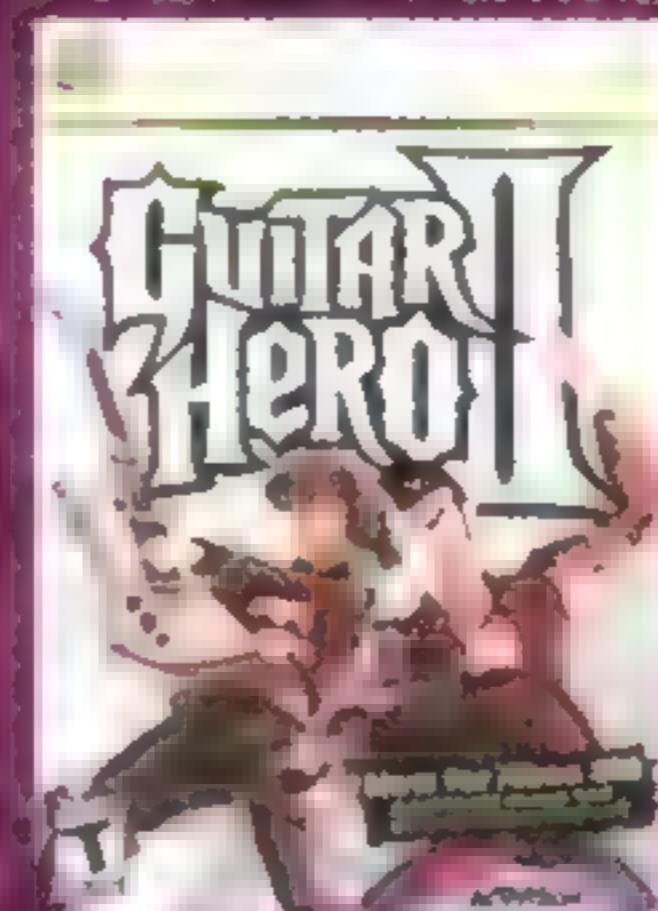
HOT HITS: "Killer Queen," "Cowboys From Hell"

The one that started it all, and the only one RedOctane published independently. Introduced the phrase "Star Power" into the gaming lexicon, and its success surprised even the development team.



Guitar Hero II

NOVEMBER 2006



PLATFORMS: PS2, Xbox 360

GUITAR CONTROLLER:

Gibson SG (cherry); Gibson

X-Plorer (white)

HOT HITS: "Beast and the Harlot," "Sweet Child O' Mine"

Word of mouth on the first game helped spur on the sales of the sequel – just in time for the game mechanics to be refined. An Xbox 360 version arrived in April 2007 with eight exclusive tracks, including "Dead!" by My Chemical Romance and Iron Maiden's "The Trooper."



Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the 80s

JULY 2007

PLATFORM: PS2

GUITAR CONTROLLER: None

HOT HITS: "Holy Diver," "Play with Me"

Harmonix' half-hearted swan song to *GH* was stuck between the end of *GH II* Xbox 360 development and the massive undertaking that was *Rock Band*'s debut. The result is a collection of shredacular songs hiding behind a sloppy neon paint job.

PlayStation 2



ty painful learning process for us," says Rigopulos. "We were crushing in focus tests – people were loving them and refusing to leave at the end of the sessions. We had a big publisher behind the games and we were sure the games were going to be successful. We got fantastic reviews... and then they just failed in the marketplace."

Harmonix shifted gears – and publishers – to work on the *Karaoke Revolution* series with Konami. An extension of *Dance Dance Revolu-*

tion (at least in name), the game featured a microphone and dozens of licensed songs, taking drunken caterwauling out of bowling alley bars and into American homes. Five of those titles sold well enough to keep the company afloat, but "they weren't blockbuster hits – they were just base hits, sustaining a mildly profitable franchise for a while," admits Rigopulos. "We made a product that was easier to market and easier to understand, but it didn't have that kind of grip

pingly addictive gameplay that our early games had."

Destiny, that's your cue. "This tiny game publisher, RedOctane, came along and said, 'We are huge fans of your games, and we make controllers. If we make a guitar controller, will you guys design and build a guitar game for us?' Amazingly, in the beginning we were kinda reluctant, because they were this tiny company – they were like half the size we were. They had no money or marketing resources.

They had no experience in publishing, and we thought, there is no way this game is going to be successful. Flip side of that is that this was the game we had been dreaming of making for years. We had complete creative freedom. We decided to do it, and of course, *Guitar Hero* happened."

But this isn't a game that just "happened." Banded down from the rock gods atop the misty mountain. The 49-person team at Harmonix had to make its dream game in just





nine months, so it could be in stores in time for the crucial holiday shopping season. Work began immediately – with beer, and music videos, and some spirited discussions about AC/DC and The Who. It became clear that this guitar game would definitely be a *rock* guitar game, in no small part because so many Harmonix employees were musicians active in the Boston rock scene. Armed with the multitrack masters of Weezer's "Dope Nose" from *Amplitude* and a few home-studio covers of "Walk This Way" and "Ain't Talkin' Bout Love," a rough prototype was built to prove the concept, with humble 2D graphics – and the team realized it was already fun to play. The previous doubts were cast aside; Harmonix felt they were on to something.

Reusing some of the programming code from the *Karaoke Revolution* projects saved the team a lot of time and hassle, but there was a bigger hurdle to face: The plastic guitar-shaped controller that would become synonymous with the series didn't exist yet. During development, the team had to scrounge up Japanese

"WE THOUGHT, THERE IS NO WAY THIS GAME IS GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL."

HARMONIX'S ALEX RIGOPULOS,
DEVELOPER OF GUITAR HERO

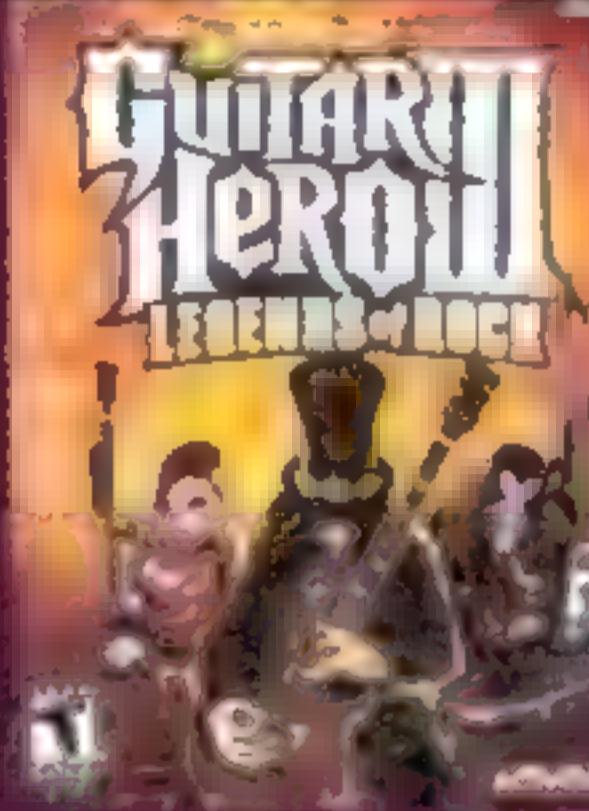
controllers designed for the PlayStation game *GuitarFreaks*, which were, in a word, cryptacular – flaky buttons, a strum bar that only worked in one direction, and no whammy bar. Plus, they broke – nearly 100 of them. Entire portions of *Guitar Hero* couldn't be accurately tested until RedOctane could produce reliable prototypes, and even though they worked great, they came in small numbers. Worse, due to the realities of resources and deadlines, large chunks of the game had to be cut during development, including the variable-speed practice mode that wouldn't be seen until *Guitar Hero II* and a freestyle make-your-own-solo mode that never did materialize.

Still, by November, *Guitar Hero* was ready for its retail debut, and sold a respectable 140,000 copies in its first six weeks of release. Then, it just kept going. In the games biz, anything over 300,000 units is considered a sizable hit – and this game reached that number in three months at \$70 a pop with a black plastic Gibson SG replica as standard equipment. "Normally what happens is that you have a big spike in sales before the holidays," says Rigopulos. "Everybody's buying the game and then the bottom falls out. In the case of *Guitar Hero*, we had a big spike in the

Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock

OCTOBER 2007

PlayStation 2



PLATFORMS:

PS2, Xbox 360,
PS3, Wii, PC,
Mac

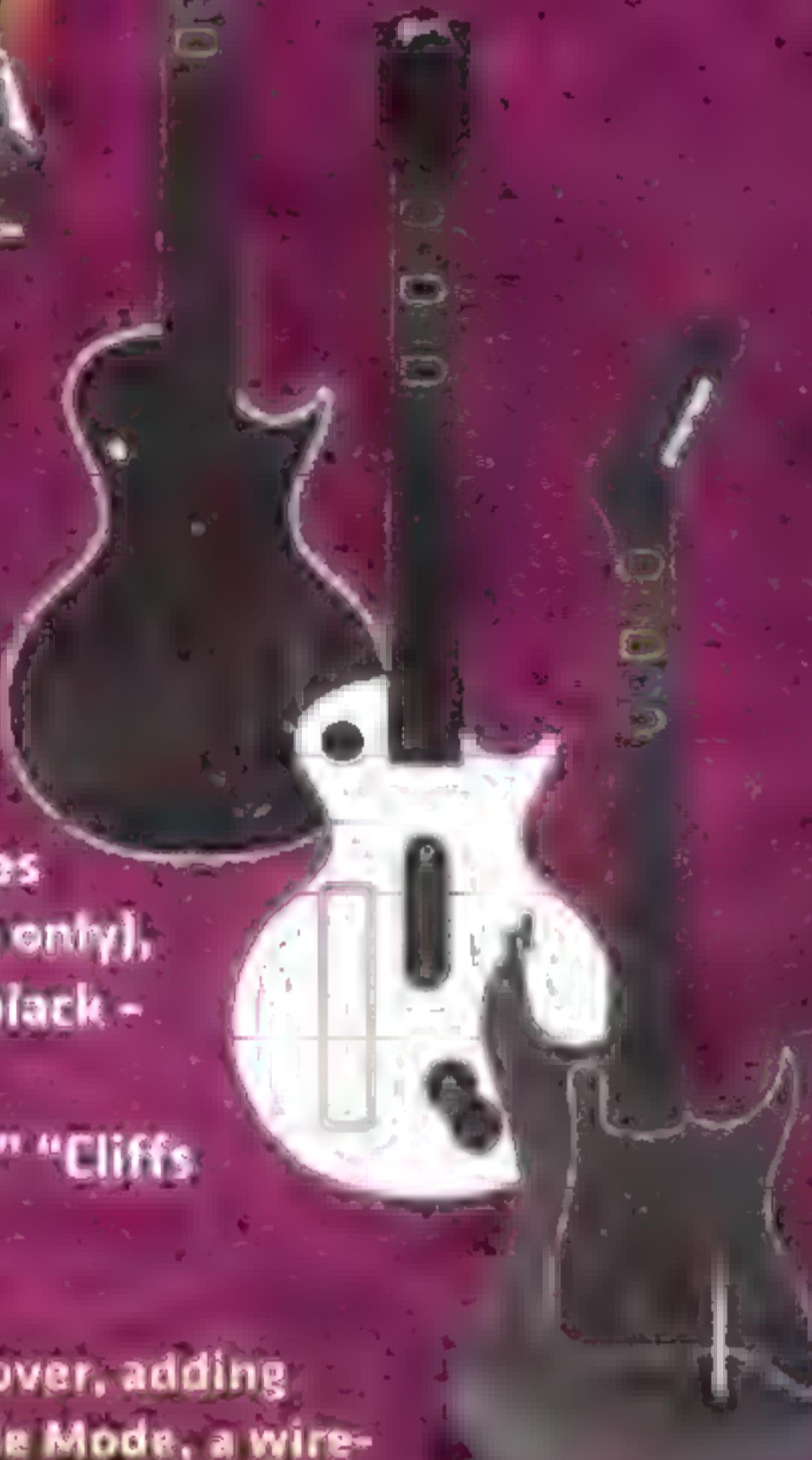
GUITAR CONTROLLER:

Gibson Les Paul
(black), Gibson Les
Paul (white - Wii only),
Kramer Striker (black -
PS2 only)

HOT HITS:

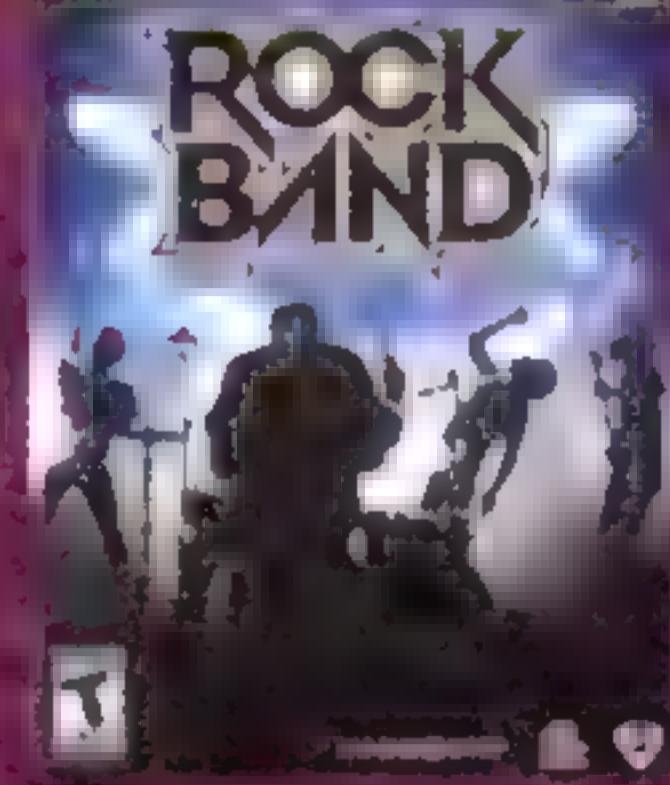
"One," "Cliffs
of Dover"

Neversoft takes over, adding
online play, Battle Mode, a wire-
less controller with interchange-
able faceplates, and real-life stars
like Slash and Tom Morello.



Rock Band

NOVEMBER 2007

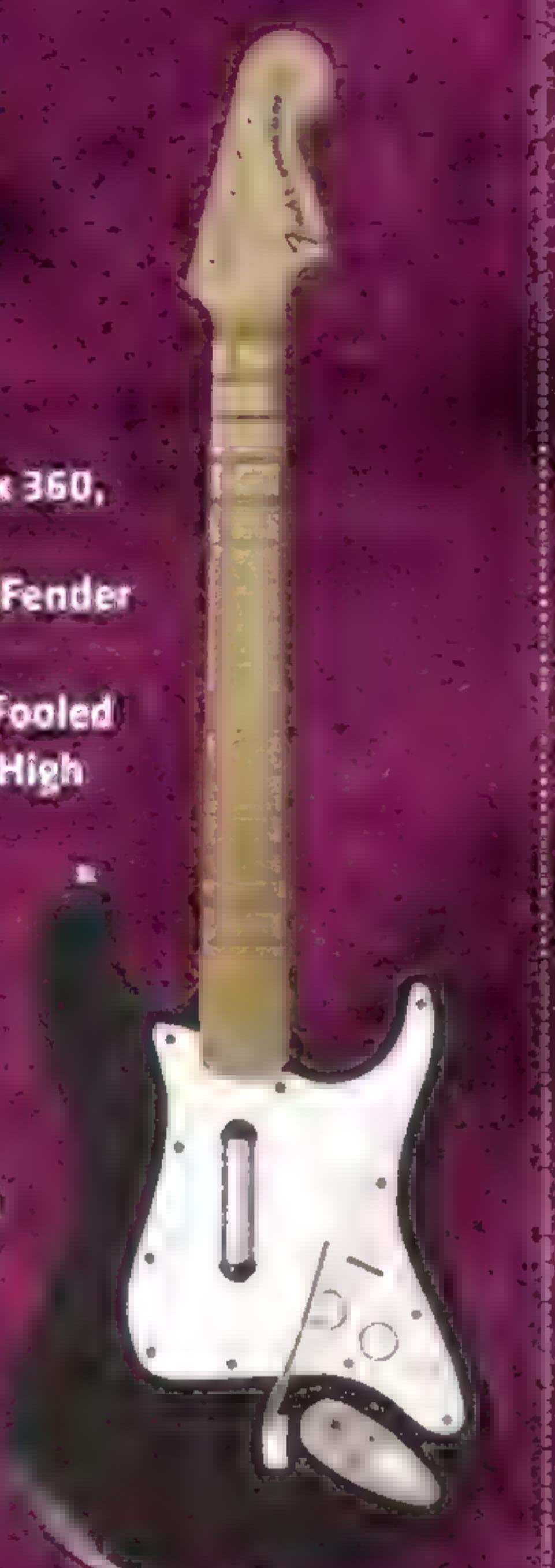


PLATFORMS: PS2, Xbox 360,
PS3, Wii

GUITAR CONTROLLER: Fender
Stratocaster

HOT HITS: "Won't Get Fooled
Again," "Green Grass & High
Tides"

Drums and vocals join
guitar and bass for a
four-player cooperative
experience; everybody gets to create
their own character and
play through the career
mode as a group. GH
guitars work fine
with the 360 version
of Rock Band, but
PS3 players aren't
so lucky.



Guitar Hero: On Tour

JUNE 2008

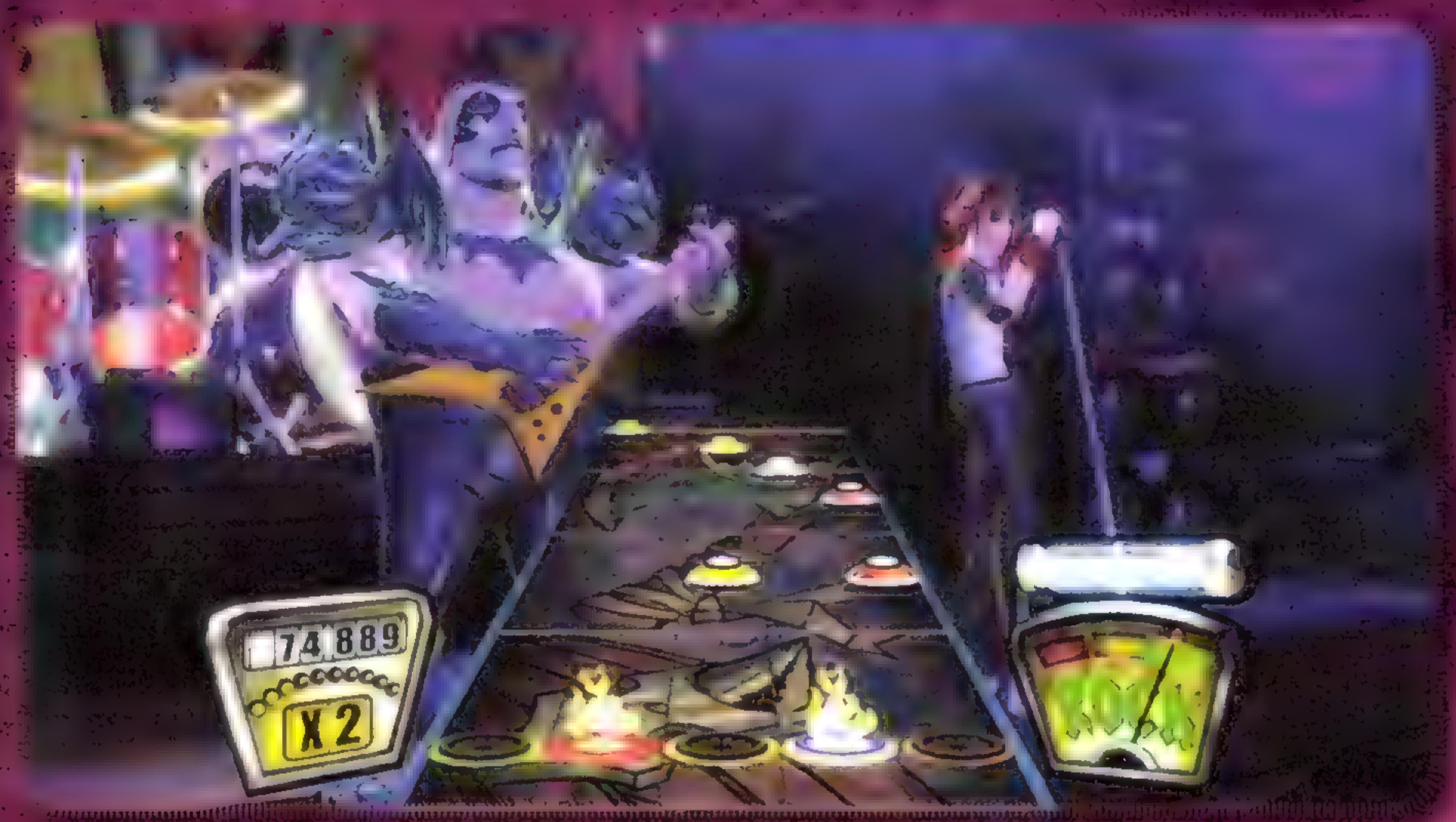


PLATFORM: Nintendo DS

GUITAR CONTROLLER: Custom grip with
stylus pick

HOT HITS: "Pride and Joy," "Helicopter"

Reduce the buttons from five to four, plug a special grip controller into the cartridge slot, then strum the touch-screen in time with the music. It adds bulk to the slim DS but it's authentic GH on the go.



holidays and then the game sold more copies every single month thereafter. Basically, as fast as RedOctane could make the guitars, the games were selling to retail and selling out." In about a year, word of mouth helped propel the title to a whopping million units sold. Seeing the start of something big, game publisher Activision quickly bought RedOctane – but, curiously, not Harmonix.

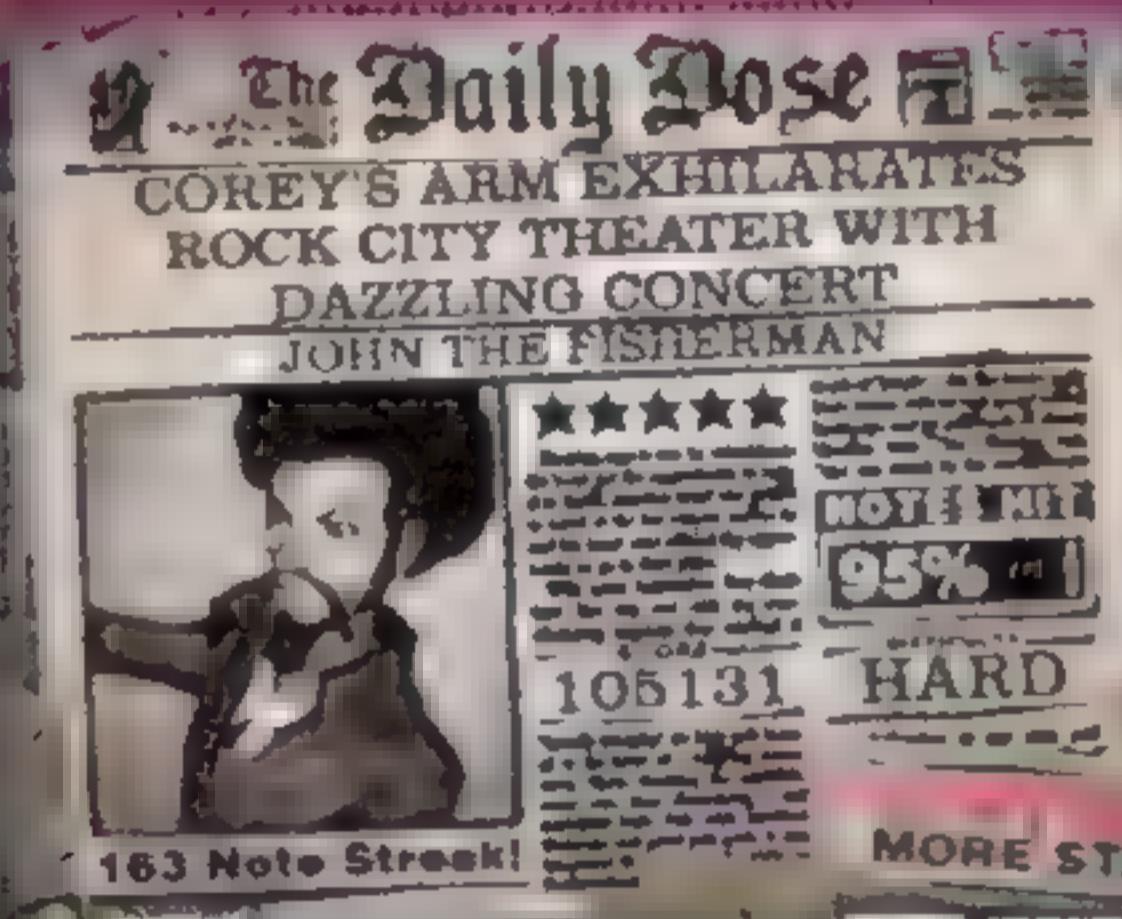
A sequel was inevitable, and *Guitar Hero II* brought more tracks, more characters, and more unlockable guitars and basses with it

when it arrived in November 2006. It also brought with it easier permissions from artists who had previously been uninterested in licensing their music. "One that pops to mind that was hard last time but was instant this time was Guns N' Roses," says Ted Lange, Associate Producer for the GH series at RedOctane. "We tried to get them for the first game...no answer. I don't even know if we got a 'no.' This time, we said 'Sweet Child O' Mine' and a week later, it was 'Here you go!'" Some artists, like Jane's Addiction and My Chem-

ical Romance, were even more eager than that to be involved, offering not only their permission but their master recordings for use on the soundtrack. "With Primus," recalls Lange, "we said 'Hey, can we license the song [John the Fisherman] from you?' and they said, 'Sure...any reason why you don't want the masters?' 'Okay, we do.'"

By this time, Microsoft's Xbox 360 had arrived, and Activision had already hinted at the *Guitar Hero* series spreading its wings beyond the PlayStation 2. Sure enough, a 360 version appeared in

April 2007. "We knew we couldn't just give people the same thing that we gave them on the PS2," says Lange. "So we added 10 extra tracks, we upscaled the models, we made it HD, and we saw a lot of potential with stuff we could do on Xbox Live Marketplace. Xbox 360 seemed like the obvious place to go." The 360 version brought with it a new controller, a white replica of a Gibson X-Plorer. If the cherry SG that came with GHII on the PS2 recalled Angus Young's famous AC/DC axe, this was a clear homage to James Hetfield of Metallica.



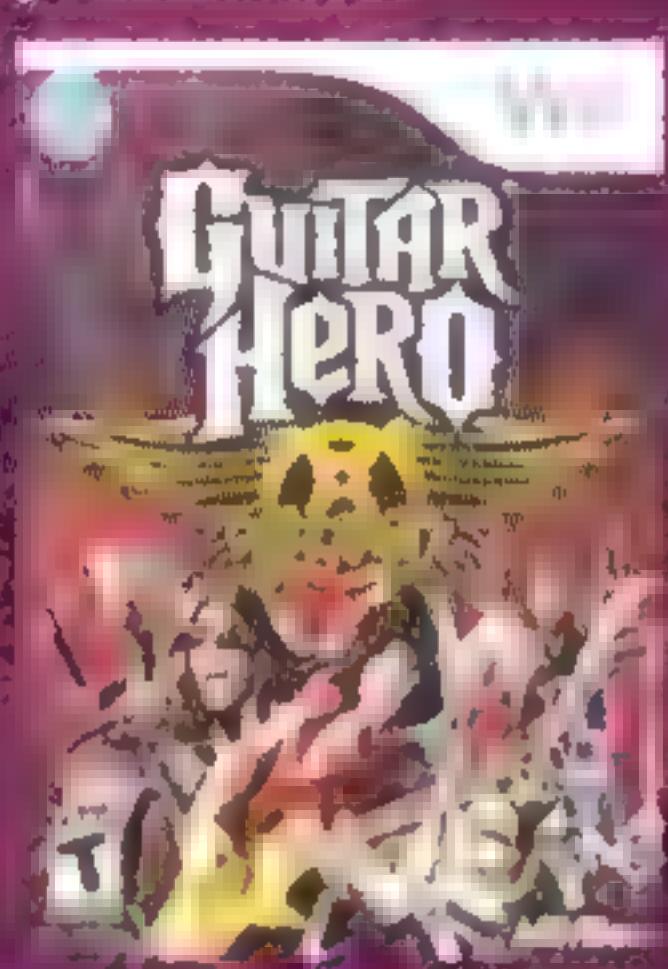
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Guitar Hero: Aerosmith

JUNE 2008



PLATFORMS: PS2, Xbox 360, PS3, Wii

GUITAR CONTROLLER: Gibson Les Paul

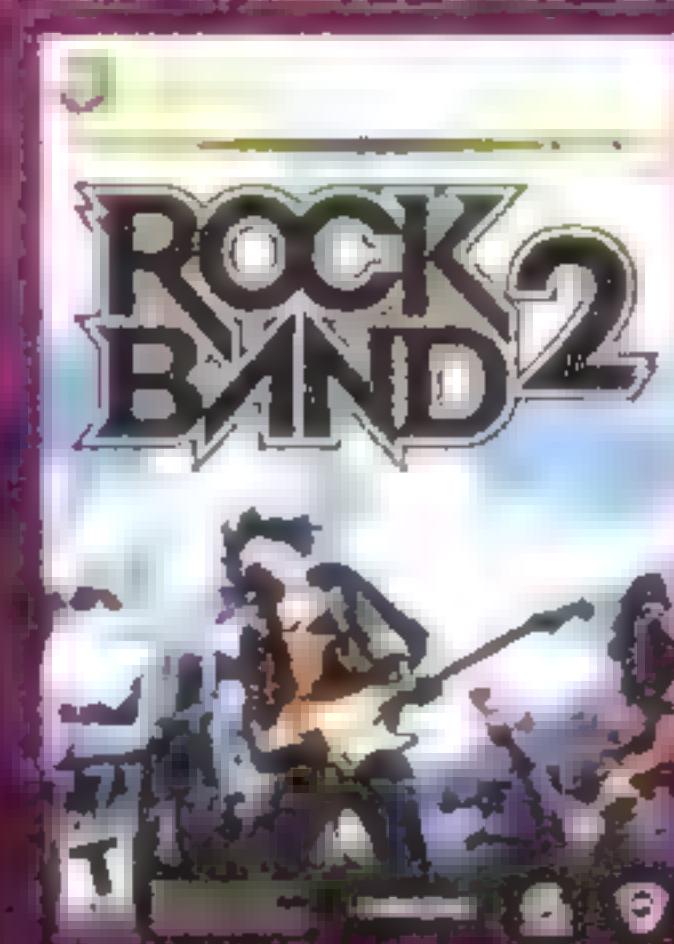
HOT HITS: "Sweet Emotion," "Walk This Way"

While most of the game's tracks come from Aerosmith's catalog, close to half are idols, friends, and/or touring buddies of the band, such as Cheap Trick, Lenny Kravitz, and Run-DMC.



Rock Band 2

SEPTEMBER 2008



PLATFORMS: PS2, Xbox 360, PS3, Wii

GUITAR CONTROLLER: Fender Stratocaster (sunburst)

HOT HITS: "Any Way You Want It," "Pinball Wizard"

Harmonix promises improved controllers, an online Band World Tour, and the ability to use all your original Rock Band downloaded songs in the sequel. The Xbox 360 gets the game first in a time-limited exclusive; everybody else will have to wait a few months.



Guitar Hero: World Tour

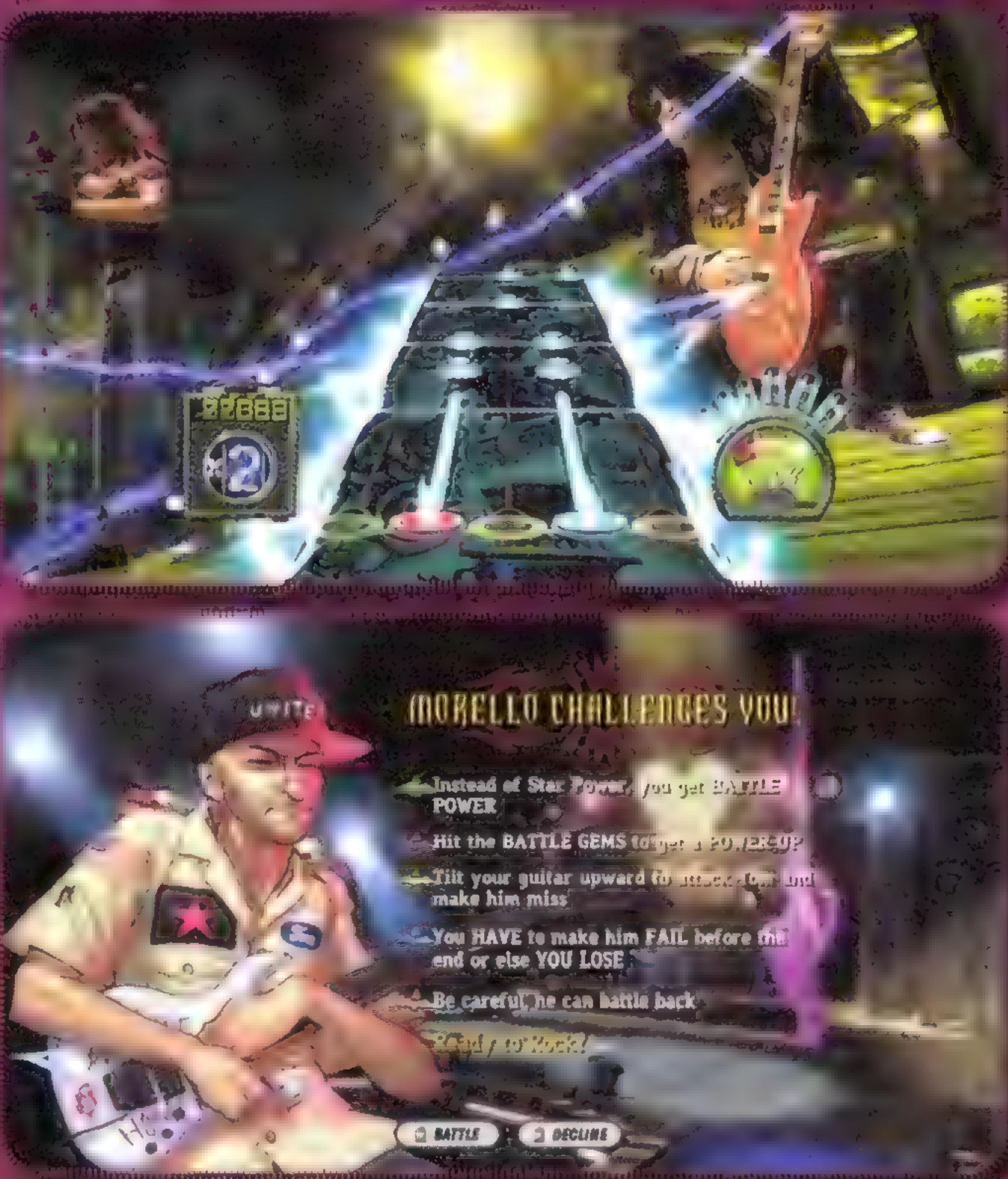
OCTOBER 2008

PLATFORMS: PS2, Xbox 360, PS3, Wii

GUITAR CONTROLLER: Original Strat-style design (sunburst)

HOT HITS: "Rebel Yell," "Everlong"

Neversoft will debut its own (wireless) drum kit and microphone for four-play, plus World Tour will feature an ambitious music creation suite that lets you make, record, and share your own music online, using only the game controllers.



"At the roundtable of brainstorming, the Flying V kept coming up, but you can't play a V sitting down," says Lange. The X-Plorer's "crazy rock-looking" design and heavy-rock history still had plenty of cred...not to mention brand

synergy. "Xbox, X-Plorer," notes Lange. "Kind of makes sense."

Activision's investment paid off: with aggressive marketing and even better word of mouth than the first game received, *Guitar Hero II*'s twin-platform assault went on to

sell in excess of three million copies in a little more than a year. But just as fans started to dream of what a third game would offer — online play? downloadable guitars? a full band? — a shocking news story emerged: game developer Harmonix had been bought by MTV Games. Harmonix didn't own *Guitar Hero* — RedOctane and Activision did — and the studio wouldn't be working on the third game. Rigopulos calls the decision "bittersweet. Obviously *Guitar Hero* is dear to our hearts. It was our breakthrough game and we are very proud of having created it." But the company's next act was the one everyone had been waiting for: a four-player co-operative game that added drums and vocals into the guitar and bass mix. Dubbed simply *Rock Band*, the new system used Karaoke Revolution-style pitch-matching for the vocals and introduced an electronic drum kit with four pads and a kick pedal. "As successful as *Guitar Hero* has been, we really felt like it was just the tip of the iceberg — just a glimmer of what the category could become," says Rigopulos. "There was such an intensity of passion and enthusiasm for *Rock Band* and where we thought we could go next with this category that it didn't take us too long to get over [losing *Guitar Hero*]."

Meanwhile, the inevitable *Guitar Hero III* got underway with a new studio at the helm. Neversoft not only had skills and credentials as the developer of the *Tony Hawk* series of skateboarding games, it had a company-wide Friday night ritual: LCD projector, keg of beer, and *Guitar Hero*.

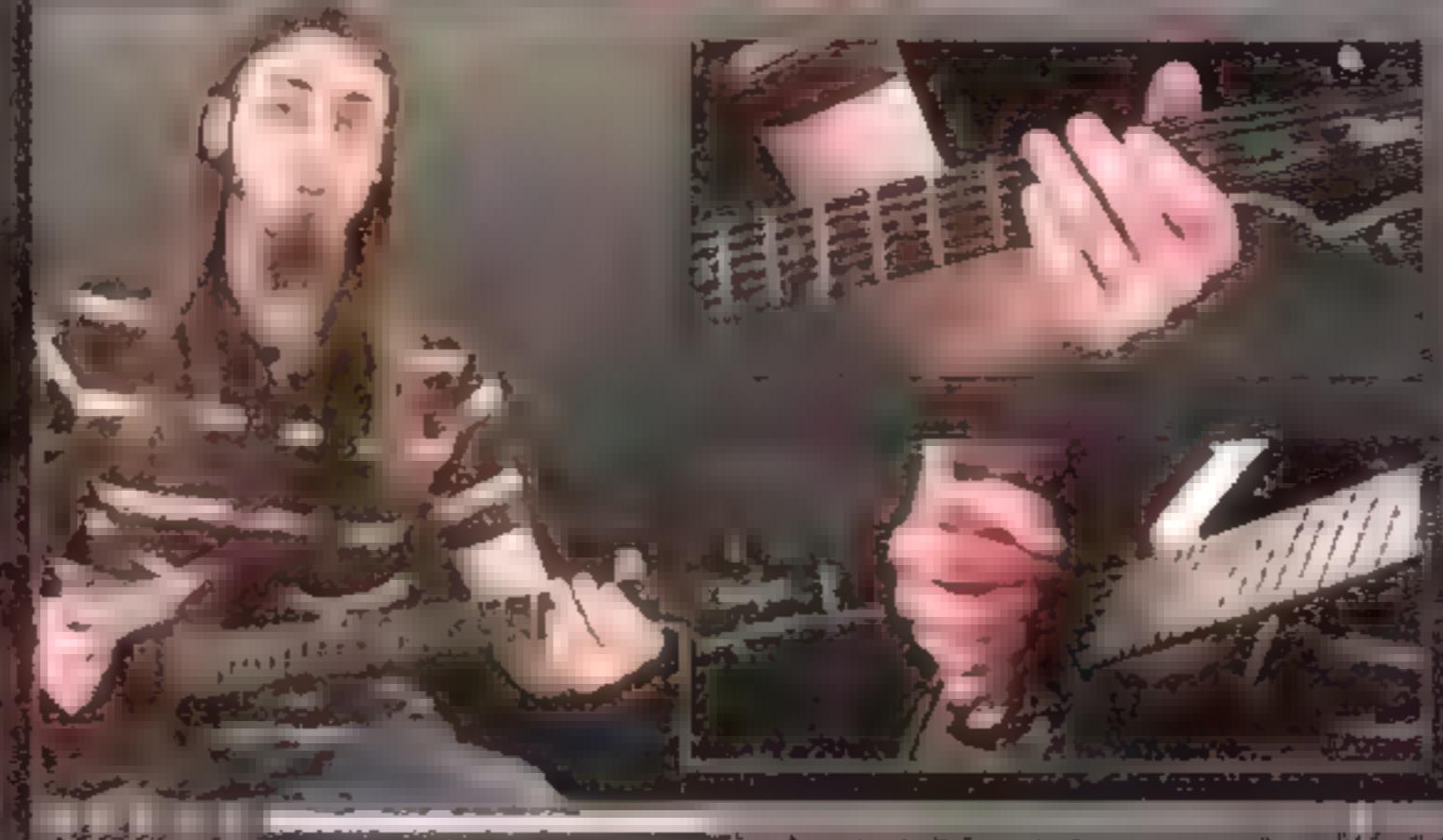
"Everybody loved that game," says Alan Flores, Lead Designer of *Guitar Hero III*. "What a cool idea. Everybody kind of embraced it and we got a buzz going on in the office. We put it on a projector in the back room, and then suddenly every week, we were having a big *Guitar Hero* party. And it continued through *Guitar Hero II*. We were just into it." At a trade show, Neversoft president Joel Jewett let RedOctane know what big fans they'd earned — and a few years later, realizing that Harmonix would likely not be continuing with the franchise, RedOctane "called Joel directly. And I don't think they were supposed to do that — you're supposed to follow corporate guidelines or whatever. But they did it anyway. They said, 'Hey man, would you want to make *Guitar Hero*?' And Joel's like, 'Yeah — fuckin' A, I certainly would like to do that.'"

But Neversoft was starting from scratch, with only about 30 team

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members, and 18 show months and none of it was in programming code. "There was talk that we were going to co-develop it at first, but that was before *Rolling Stone* was official," reveals Flores. Still, the company had plenty of assets in its talent, its fresh ideas and its fervent love of the games. "Just being fans of the franchise, we didn't want to fuck it up," says Flores. "That was the first

thing that came to our mind - we wanted to do a pure *Guitar Hero* experience. We wanted it to have the essence of what make the games so cool and make everybody love it so much. People loving the game as much as they do made us nervous - they're going to be skeptical. And initially when they found out we were going to do it, there was a lot of trash talked - there's still trash being talked!"

It didn't help that the franchise came with a built-in rivalry. "That's one of the weird things," says Flores. "Hey guys, here's this awesome franchise, we want you guys to do it! Oh by the way, the guys who did the original one are going to compete against you! Oh, great! You just kind of got kicked in the nuts when you thought you were at the top of the world."

Exactly how to push the game

forward without alienating the fans was one of the main challenges. "We had to get the core mechanics down first, but then we had to try and take the game to the next evolution - advance upon what was already done before," he says. "We couldn't have someone who had played *Guitar Hero II* play *Guitar Hero III* and go 'this totally doesn't belong.' " One of the new additions was the Battle Mode, a head-to-head duel between two players, where either can make their opponent break a string, fry their amp, or suddenly have to play left-handed. "Initially, the whole thing was inspired by old-school guitar duels, like in the movie *Crossroads* - cuttin' heads back and forth," reveals Flores. "But also puzzle games - like *Puzzle Fighter*, for example

"WE TRIED TO GET GUNS N' ROSES FOR THE FIRST GAME... NO ANSWER. I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF WE GOT A 'NO.'"

TED LANGE, ASSOCIATE PRODUCER, RED OCTANE

- that had a competitive aspect as opposed to just moving blocks. You could send things over to screw up your opponent. Or like *Mario Kart*, where you're not just racing, you're sending attacks to your opponent. We wanted to take that whole gaming part of it and apply it to the guitar side of it."

The next logical step was to get real guitarists on board to be digitized into the game as boss characters, if not contribute original music. "When we started brainstorming on bosses, there was a lot of back and forth, but I think we got really lucky with the two guys who wound up doing it," says Flores. "Slash is a great boss not only because he's a great guitar player who plays with a lot of feeling, but he's this huge larger-than-life character. You see him walking down the street, it's clearly Slash. So I think he was the perfect fit. Tom Morello helped complement that too - he doesn't play guitar like a regular guitar, he pushes the boundaries of what guitar playing is. Tom is a Harvard grad and he's very methodical in the way he does things. He had this spreadsheet that he drew out - 'Okay, *Guitar Player A* is kicking ass here and really coming back, so I need



to go re-do my part on part B. He had this checklist, and it was pretty interesting to see his approach to it. Slash was more like, he just came out and played a lot of stuff. He just went with the feel of things. They were both totally easy to work with – we got kind of lucky."

While the game drew some criticism for its increased difficulty, it didn't hurt sales. Neversoft silenced the skeptics with excellent reviews and sales in the ballpark of 12 million copies across six platforms – many of which were sold with a replica Les Paul controller, the first in the series to be wireless. The success was validation that Neversoft could live up to the game's legacy.

"I think we made a pretty kick-ass game in *Guitar Hero III*," says Flores.

But attention quickly turned to Neversoft's second set. By early 2008, rumors began to circulate about a *Guitar Hero* game starring a single artist – and the rumors turned out to be true when it came to a little bluesy band from Boston. "Aerosmith is the Great American Rock & Roll Band – and I think a lot of people forget that," says Flores. "They weren't just this band that made this sappy ballad for the movie *Armageddon* – they're this band that made this kick-ass music in the 70s and Joe Perry is an awesome guitar player. They're the real deal. And



we thought, let's try to remind everybody that that's what they are." Not only did Aerosmith's back catalog fit *Guitar Hero*'s template, but the band had been notoriously game-friendly in the past, participating in the arcade shooting game *Revolution X* and an early PC "virtual guitar" program called *Quest for Fame*. "They got it pretty quickly," says Flores of the band, "partly because Joe Perry's son Roman was really into the game, so Joe knew what it was all about. We had a cover version of 'Same Old Song & Dance' in *Guitar Hero III*, and Joe said, 'That doesn't sound right – nobody sounds like Steven Tyler except Steven Tyler.' So we tried to get the master version and it apparently got back to Joe Perry himself. And he said, 'That's awesome, take the original song – and what else can we do?' He understood what a big deal it was to be in this game. Joe Perry was sort of driving the project, but all the guys were on board. They knew."

With *Guitar Hero* games on every platform imaginable, including handheld versions for Nintendo DS and mobile phones – not to men-

tion stand-alone *GH* toys that let even the youngest would-be rockers get their act together – the music gaming genre shows no signs of slowing down. This year will bring *Guitar Hero: World Tour* and *Rock Band 2* to stores shelves, which both feature four-person, full-band play, online modes, and in the case of *GHWT*, a music creation tool that turns players into composers. "I don't think we're seeing the end of it any time soon," says Flores. "There's tons and tons of great music that people have never played. There are genres that have never been explored."

Rigopoulos not only agrees but thinks guitar-based games are the start of a major shift in how people interact with music in general. "I think in three to five years, people are going to expect to be able to play with music as the normal way they experience music that they love," he suggests. "So if you have a favorite band that releases a new album, yeah, you'll buy the CD or you'll download it on iTunes or whatever – but you will also want to go into *Rock Band* and download the game levels based upon those 15 new songs and experience them as an active participant in the music making. It's the environment that you will expect to absorb all the music that you love, and you'll experience it that way for years to come." ☀





Guitar Hero GETS REAL

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WITH SOPHISTICATED SONGWRITING TOOLS
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THE UPCOMING GUITAR HERO: WORLD TOUR
ISN'T JUST PLAYING GAMES ANYMORE.

» By Dan Amrich

The Gear

The Guitarists

THE GAMES ➤

PLATFORM: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii, PlayStation 2
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Neversoft
MULTIPLAYER: Four players online or same screen
RELEASE DATE: Fall 2008



We've all heard it: "All that time you've wasted playing fake guitar could have been spent learning how to make real music!" Here's good news, then, for every wanna-be and gonna-be: fake guitars and real music are no longer mutually exclusive. *Guitar Hero: World Tour* not only plans to deliver the rock, but it expects you to create your own and send it back.

Guitar Hero III proved that game developer Neversoft could take care of the franchise now. It's time to innovate. In our first look at what would have been called *Guitar Hero 4*, the words "Rock Band" were never uttered, but its presence was clearly felt. *Guitar Hero: World Tour* takes many of its cues from Harmonix's make-your-own-rock-band sensation and improves on the formula. *Guitar Hero* is still played by vocals and guitars, but it's a four-player collaboration, meaning it's not offering the same rote-fail system as *Rock Band* (on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3), or some mix of the two. If your vocalist and guitarist are roommates but your rhythm section lives across town or across the country, playing together is no longer a problem. What's more, your entire four-person band can test your skills against another four-person band online in – what

else? – a new mode called Battle of the Bands. That's a pretty major leap in online support, considering that *Guitar Hero III* was the first game in the series to even enable online play, and there, it was just head-to-head battles.

Whereas earlier *Guitar Hero* games have simply unfolded as linear ladders that throw tracks your way and challenge you to play a fleet of songs before moving on to another batch, the career mode of *World Tour* offers a lot more

freedom. You're a rock-and-roll mercenary, checking the local musician bulletin board for open gigs. Those gigs can be on any instrument in any genre and in any area of the world, so if you just aren't feeling the punk thing today, seek out a



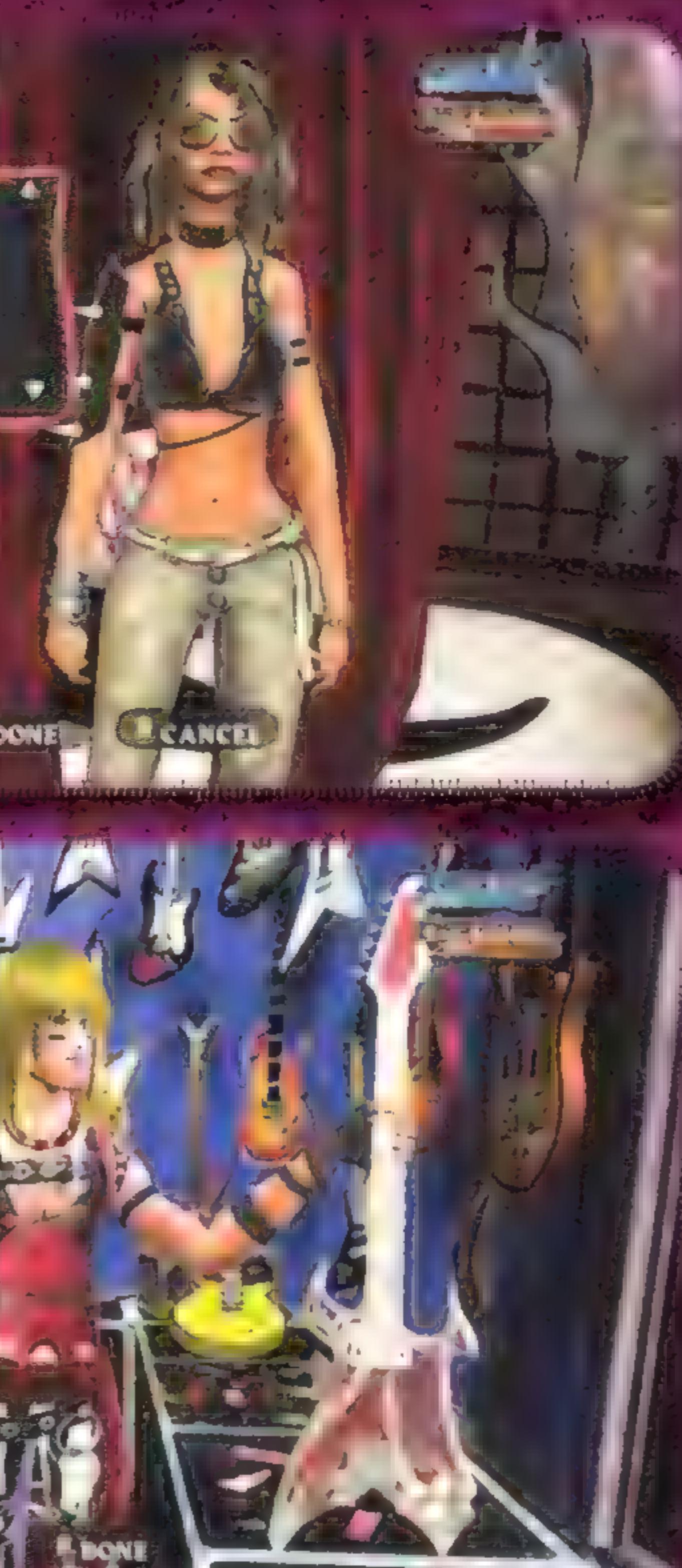


metal gig instead. And if you find that you've taken on something that's too tough for your skills, you don't have to keep banging your head against the wall — bang your head at a lower difficulty level for the rest of your career, or at least until you get your chops back. Being able to shift between Medium and Hard without starting a new career will make *Guitar Hero* a lot more fun for a lot more people — and if there's a mini-metalhead in the house, a new even-easier-than-Easy mode called Beginner will simplify the game to the point where little kids and hopeless grannies can feel like they're rocking out even if they're barely playing. You'll find individual careers for all four instruments, plus a fifth to cater to the band experience.

If you're going to get a band together, naturally the first thing to worry about is your image. GHWT includes a Create-a-Rocker feature, and if you've played any of Neversoft's Tony Hawk skateboarding games, you'll have a good idea of how deep the player creation goes - you control your musician's age, from high school dropout to Rolling Stone. Choose the shape and size of your face, see what life looks like behind blue eyes (or green, or hazel), select a dope nose, and make up your



makeup – from designing your tattoos and selecting how transparent your layers of makeup should be, so your tiger stripes will never cover up your eye shadow. And if you want green skin, what the hell – you can have that, too. (The developers put it this way: "We're not



after realism, so we might as well let you have fun.") From there, it's on to choosing your fashion statements with an outrageous stage wardrobe — with most pieces, from leather jackets to spandex tights, available in just about any color you can think of — and ultimately

selecting your stage presence. You choose the introduction, win, and loss animations that best fit your virtual personality. All that adds up to the most "you" in a *Guitar Hero* game to date. But if you're partial to the existing stable of characters, don't worry. All of the standard playable characters from the first three games are back – Midori, Pandora, Clive, Eddie, Judy, Johnny, Lars, Izzy, Axel, and Casey will all be back, and you can play dress-up with them as well.

Due to a legal dispute with Gibson, you won't find the familiar Les Pauls, SGs, and Flying Vs that have appeared in earlier games, but you will find a new playground to let your wildest woody fantasies run wild. Picture that same amount of character detail and apply it to your six-string. You start with some basic shapes that recall famous guitars (we spotted designs that reminded us of Fender, Gibson, BC Rich, and Alembic, among many others), but they're just different enough to avoid a lawsuit. Once you've got a base, go crazy in the custom shop of your dreams: Paint your guitar one of thousands of colors (and add custom designs as well), pick your pickups, fretboard inlays, bridge, pickguard — even the strings and volume knobs (yes, you can have



dice – or skulls). Honestly, you can make some truly hideous instruments, but at least you'll be sure that nobody you meet online will have your ugly signature model. Similar customizing options exist for basses, microphones, and drum kits, the latter of which range from stripped-down punk three-pieces to double-bass prog rock monstrosities.

Oh yeah, the drums. A first for the *Guitar Hero* franchise, the drum controller features six zones – three drum pads for snare and toms, with two cymbal wedges for hi-hat and ride/crash positioned on small rods above the pads. The final zone is the kick drum, activated by a floor pedal at the bottom of the stand. The symmetrical layout and adjustable cymbals mean this kit should be easily customized for comfort, whether you're right or left handed, and you can cut the cord – like the Les Paul controller from *GHIII*, the drum kit is wonderfully wireless. The pads are a resilient silicone rubber, which should offer a soft-wafer, more responsive, and most of all quieter drum experience in comparison to the *Rock Band* drum kit. And since the whole system is based around the MIDI electronic music standard, *Guitar Hero: World Tour* will track velocity values. That means if you hit hard for the thunderous parts and play a softer, speedier fill a little later in the same song, the game can pick up your intensity and the drums will sound appropriately subtle or booming. Neversoft's showed us what was powering the prototype drum kit, and we were surprised to find it was



the digital brain behind a Roland V-Drum set – pro-level gear that usually runs \$1200 or so. That won't be what's in the final *GHWT* kit, mind you, but it's a good sign that Neversoft is taking this seriously.

Vocalists won't have anything quite so revolutionary in their hand – all the *Guitar Hero: World Tour* microphone really has to do is pick up your voice when you warble into it – but guitarists and bassists get a new toy to play with with some pretty significant upgrades. The familiar five colored buttons are

back, but they're joined by colored segments of a pressure-sensitive pad a little higher up the neck. This touch pad can be used to bend sustained notes on the fly or tapped like buttons to register notes. The Strat-style body is bigger than the Les Paul controller and offers strap pegs on both horns to accommodate right- and left-handed gamers. The whammy bar is longer, the strum bar is wider, and the directional pad has been combined with the power indicator in a neat stack that approximates the look of a

volume knob. And when it's time to activate Star Power, most gamers simply tilt the guitar's neck up, but lots of top-tier gamers prefer to hit the Select/Back button instead, so their left hand is left undistracted from the flurry of notes. To cater to that crowd (and to give the guitar a little more lifelike aesthetics), the Select/Back button is now the spitting image of a stop tailpiece, perpendicular to the strum bar in the body of the guitar. It's a big horizontal button (with the words "Star Power" emblazoned on it, of course) that should be easy to trigger just by leaning your arm down in the middle of a big solo.

Activision's keeping quiet about whose solos you'll be playing; while they're promising over 90 songs (all of which are master tracks from the original artists), they'll only confirm a handful of names: Sublime ("Santeria"), Billy Idol ("Rebel Yell"), Foo Fighters ("Everlong"), and unnamed tracks by Zakk Wylde, Linkin Park and Van Halen. With the appearance of Eddie Van Halen in the roster, the new guitar controller's tappable touchpad suddenly makes a lot of sense. "Are You Gonna Go My Way" by Lenny Kravitz is probably in the game too; Activision showed it off, fully playable, at a business conference to announce the title to investors, but they still won't confirm that it will make the final cut.

But really, those prerecorded hits aren't the point of *Guitar Hero: World Tour*. The real hook here is the ability to use these fake instruments and create real music. Sneak into the Music Studio and activate a four-track recorder to record your own original compositions on guitar, bass, and drums with alarming ease. (You can record a MIDI melody track for a singer to use as a guide, but voice recordings are too big – you won't be able to actually record vocals.) Choose your predefined musical scale, pick a tempo, then creatively mash away at those buttons. Tilt the guitar neck up and down to change pitch and octave, and hold the Star Power button in for palm muting. If you're playing a guitar or bass, you'll recognize the tones from Line 6's family of POD products – and in the digital domain, quality guitar sounds don't get any more accurate than that. Once you've got a sound and a riff that you like, hit record and chronicle your genius. The notes you lay

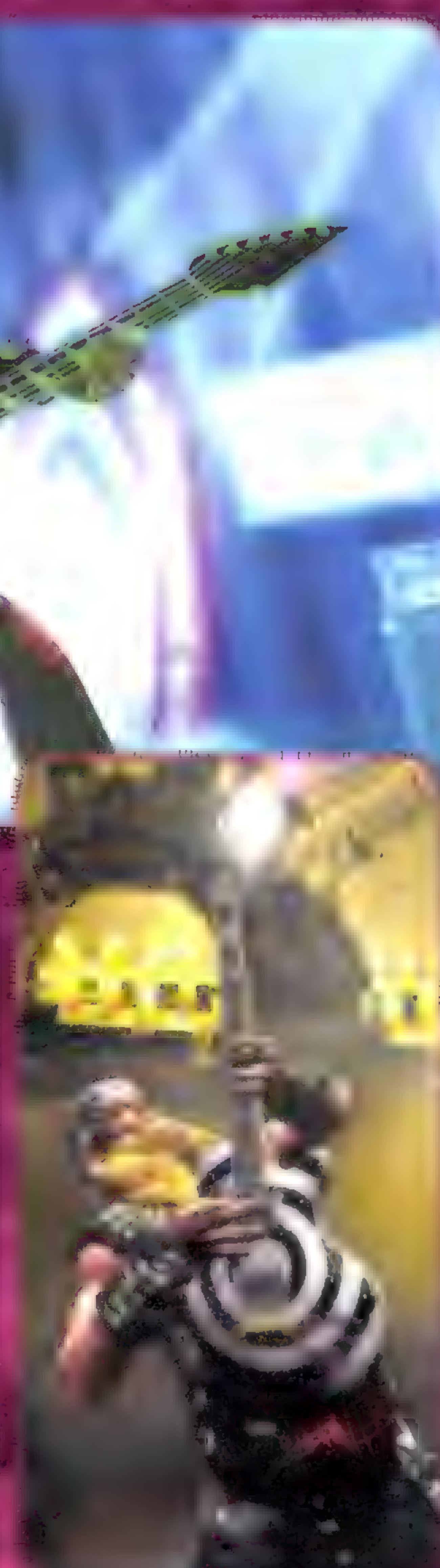


down become the Expert difficulty, and the game will then automatically analyze the difficulty to generate the easier levels. It makes sense that the original recorded version is always Expert – after all, you're the one who made it up, and nobody plays it better than you. Add in other instruments as you see fit to complete your track; if you don't wind up buying the drums, you can still use a guitar controller as a drum machine, swapping in different sampled kits for different styles and tapping out a backbeat that fits your vibe. There's a limit to the length of your compositions, but it's expected that you can make them four or five minutes long, depend-

ing on how many notes you've used.

If you make a few mistakes, you can either leave them in there as "challenging parts," or you can fine-tune them in a program called CHMix. This is where things get crazy impressive. If you've played a little bit off the beat, the program can quantize the track so that your strums and notes are always on the right rhythm. Change your mind about the bridge? Make it the chorus with a cut-and-paste swap. Punch in notes that you missed, delete the bits you regret, or fire up the looping tool to refine your bass groove. As the loop repeats, you can keep adding notes to the pattern to make it more challenging. And again, this level of depth is all accessed with a simple videogame controller – no small feat, and a great step toward bringing music making to the masses.

Once you've got a track you like – and you've set the lighting cues, so you can make sure all attention is on you for your big solo – it's time to share your creations with the world. Upload your created songs under one of the key genres (Rock, Metal, Pop, Hip-Hop, Experimental, Other), use the in-game tools to create album art to go with it, and see if the world likes your ideas. You can only upload a handful of songs, but if your work is consistently rated highly by the *GH* community, you may get approached with the equivalent of a "record deal" and be given more space to upload more tracks. Also, you don't have to worry about other people ripping off your stuff; while anyone



can download and deconstruct your songs in their own Music Studio, they won't be able to reupload their remix as their own original composition.

With such deep interactivity, is this even a game anymore? With so much stuff inside, *Guitar Hero: World Tour* may look imposing for anybody who just wants to take their air guitar fantasies to the next level. You'll definitely be able to do that, and bring more friends along for the ride. But if even if a small section of the gaming audience dedicates its free time to creating original songs (or re-creating unlicensed tracks, hint hint), those amateur producers will keep amateur rockers swimming in content for months and years to come. And if that helps bridge the gap between fake musicians and real musicians, then *Guitar Hero: World Tour* may just pull off the impossible. ☺



Rock Band 2: FIRST LOOK

You know you're doing things bad 'cause when I've



It's not unreasonable to look at *Guitar Hero: World Tour* and think "Wow, that looks like *Rock Band 2*." So what will Harmonix's franchise do for its encore? While you will see many ideas shared between the two series this year, the Boston-based developer has a few different ideas about how to move the genre forward.

Rock Band 2 will feature a new

guitar that looks much like the old one – instead of a black Strat with a maple neck, the new controller features a sunburst finish with a rosewood fretboard. The strum bar – which was notoriously "soft" and "mushy" on the original guitar – has been upgraded so it has a more precise feel. The neck buttons should be quieter, too, with less of a tactile or audible

click when pressed. But the new guitar's coolest feature by far: An auto-calibration system. If you're tired of recalibrating your TV so that the audio and video are in perfect sync, the new guitar does it for you, thanks to a small embedded microphone and photosensor. Hold the guitar up to your TV screen, wait a few seconds, and the guitar "reads" your

home theater setup so every note is on the beat, every time. That's a cool idea for the technologically impaired who simply want to rock.

For drums, the basic model is getting an upgrade, with two of the most popular after-market upgrades becoming standard features. The kick pedal, known to snap in two during heavy foot thunder, will now be reinforced

with a metal plate for superior strength and stability. The drum heads themselves will be quieter with softer, quieter material replacing the hard, thwacky rubber pads from the original set. If you've shelled out a few bucks for the adhesive *Rock Band* drum silencers, it's sort of like that. The drums will also be velocity sensitive and wireless, so in many regards, *RB2* is matching *GHWT* point for point.

However, in addition to hinting at "expandability options" for the core kit, Harmonix is strongly supporting an open standard with its drums, inviting third-party manufacturers to take a crack at making their own versions of *Rock Band* drum kits. Ion has risen to the challenge with a USB set with four large adjustable pads, three cymbals, a metal kick pedal and a sturdy collapsible stand. An early prototype was shown off to the public in early 2008, and response was so strong that the kit was cleaned up and put into production – and it looks gorgeous. The electronics can be swapped out so the same kit can be used with multiple consoles as well as PCs. An entry-level electronic drum kit that doubles as a game controller and a home studio tool? That might make it worth its \$300 price tag.

On the software side, *RB2* does most of the stuff that people wanted in the original *Rock Band*: an online Band World Tour, so you

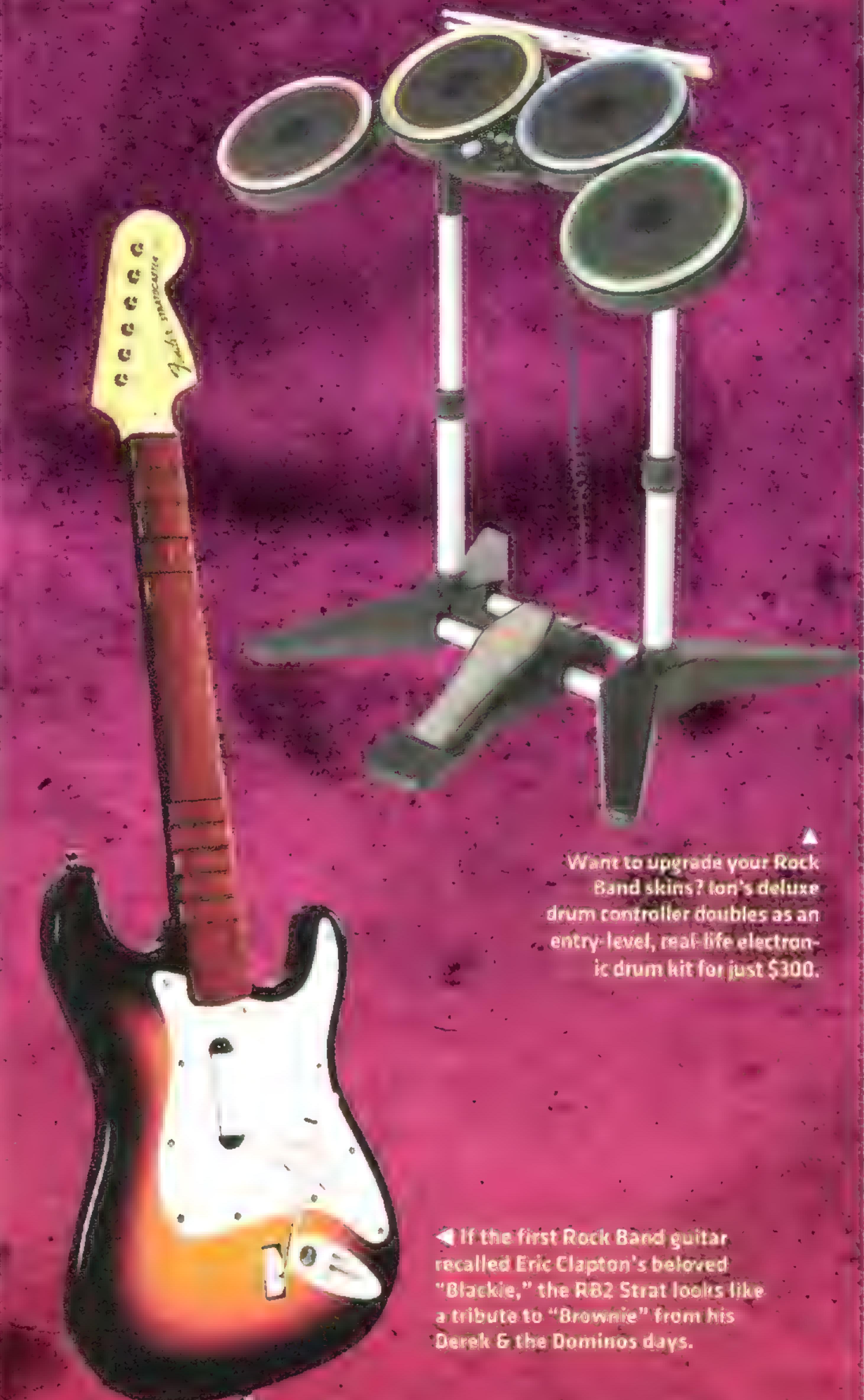
roster at will – just like Yes and Van Halen! Unfortunately, you won't be able to pit your full band against another online the way you can in *Guitar Hero: World Tour*, but the downloadable tracks you bought for the original *Rock Band* will work in *Rock Band 2* – a perk that *GHWT* sadly won't support for the *GHIII* downloads. You can use any of those tracks in a new create-a-setlist quickplay option, so if you've been buying those full album downloads, now it's easy to play the whole record in order.

And while we kind of expected Harmonix – a company created by musicians, not gamers – to be first

to market with a music creation suite like the one in *GHWT*, nothing along those lines has been announced for *Rock Band 2*. "We want it to be for everyone, not just the hardcore," says Harmonix PR coordinator John Drake. "We want to empower a lot of fans. We're musicians, so we definitely want to do it." If something's in the works, they're not saying yet. ☺



can chug through career mode with friends who aren't in your living room; the ability to create one character that can play any instrument; and a dedicated career mode for bassists. A band will no longer be tied to one character; it's linked to your Xbox Live Gamertag or PlayStation Network ID, so you can hire and fire members as you see fit, shuffling the musician



Want to upgrade your *Rock Band* skins? Ion's deluxe drum controller doubles as an entry-level, real-life electronic drum kit for just \$300.

If the first *Rock Band* guitar recalled Eric Clapton's beloved "Blackie," the *RB2* Strat looks like a tribute to "Brownie" from his *Derek & the Dominos* days.

OFFICIAL ROCK BAND 2 TRACK LIST

1 AC/DC
Let There Be Rock

2 AFI
Girl's Gone Grey

3 Alanis Morissette
You Oughta Know

4 Alice in Chains
Man in the Box

5 Allman Brothers
Ramblin' Man

6 Avenged Sevenfold
Almost Easy

7 Bad Company
Shooting Star

8 Beastie Boys
So Whatcha Want

9 Beck
E-Pro

10 Bikini Kill
Rebel Girl

11 Billy Idol
White Wedding Pt I

12 Blondie
One Way or Another

13 Bob Dylan
Tangled Up in Blue

14 Bon Jovi
Livin' on a Prayer

15 Cheap Trick
Hello There

16 Devo
Uncontrollable Urge

17 Dinosaur Jr
Feel the Pain

18 Disturbed
Down with the Sickness

19 The Donnas
New Kid in School

20 Dream Theater
Panic Attack

21 Duran Duran
Hungry Like the Wolf

22 Elvis Costello
Pump It Up

23 Fleetwood Mac
Go Your Own Way

24 Foo Fighters
Everlong

25 The Go-Go's
We Got the Beat

26 The Grateful Dead
Alabama Getaway

27 The Guess Who
American Woman

28 Guns N' Roses
Shackler's Revenge

29 Interpol
PDA

30 Jane's Addiction
Mountain Song

31 Jethro Tull
Aqualung

32 Jimmy Eat World
The Middle

33 Joan Jett
Bad Reputation

34 Journey
Anyway You Want It

35 Judas Priest
Painkiller

36 Kansas
Carry on Wayward Son

37 L7
Pretend We're Dead

38 Lacuna Coil
Our Truth

39 Linkin Park
One Step Closer

40 Lit
My Own Worst Enemy

41 Lush
De-Luxe

42 Mastodon
Colony of Birchmen

43 Megadeth
Peace Sells

44 Metallica
Battery

45 Mighty Mighty Bosstones
Where'd You Go

46 Modest Mouse
Float On

47 Motorhead
Ace of Spades

48 The Muffs
Kids in America

49 Nirvana
Drain You

50 Norman Greenbaum
Spirit in the Sky

51 The Offspring
Come Out & Play (Keep 'em Separated)

52 Panic at the Disco
Nine in the Afternoon

53 Paramore
That's What You Get

54 Pearl Jam
Alive

55 Presidents of the USA
Lump

56 Rage Against the Machine
Testify

57 Ratt
Round & Round

58 Red Hot Chili Peppers
Give It Away

59 The Replacements
Alex Chilton

60 Rise Against
Give It All

61 Rush
The Trees

62 Silversun Pickups
Lazy Eye

63 Smashing Pumpkins
Today

64 Social Distortion
I Was Wrong

65 Sonic Youth
Teenage Riot

66 Soundgarden
Spoonman

67 Squeeze
Cool for Cats

68 Steely Dan
Bodhilsattva

69 Steve Miller Band
Rock'n Me

70 Survivor
Eye of the Tiger

71 System of a Down
Chop Suey

72 Talking Heads
Psycho Killer

73 Tenacious D
Master Exploder

74 Testament
Souls of Black

75 The Who
Pinball Wizard

BONUS SONGS (all HMX bands)

76 Abnormality
Visions

77 Anarchy Club
Get Clean

78 Bang Camaro
Night Lies

79 Breaking Wheel
Save Me, Save Me

80 The Libyans
Neighborhood

81 The Main Drag
A Jagged Georgeous Winter

82 Speck
Conventional

83 The Sterns
Supreme Girl

84 That Handsome Devil
Rob the Prez-O-Dent

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The Real Guide to **FAKE GUITAR**

WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO
BE BETTER AT GUITAR
HERO AND ROCK BAND?

HERE'S THE STUFF EVERY BUDDING
SHREDDER NEEDS TO KNOW TO BE A
BETTER PHONY GUITARIST.

» *By Dan Amrich*

Lots of wanna-be guitar heroes are stuck on Medium. They see YouTube videos of people shredding in *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* and say "Wow... I could never do that." But they're wrong! YOU'RE wrong! You can break through to Hard and quickly move on to Expert in your fake six-string shredding. And it's not about maximizing star power or even knowing the song – it's actually all a matter of improving your technique. In other words, it doesn't matter what you play – *Guitar Hero II*, *Guitar Hero III*, or *Rock Band* – so much as how you play it. So grab your axe and start cuttin' – we're gonna make you a star.



Grip & Finger Placement

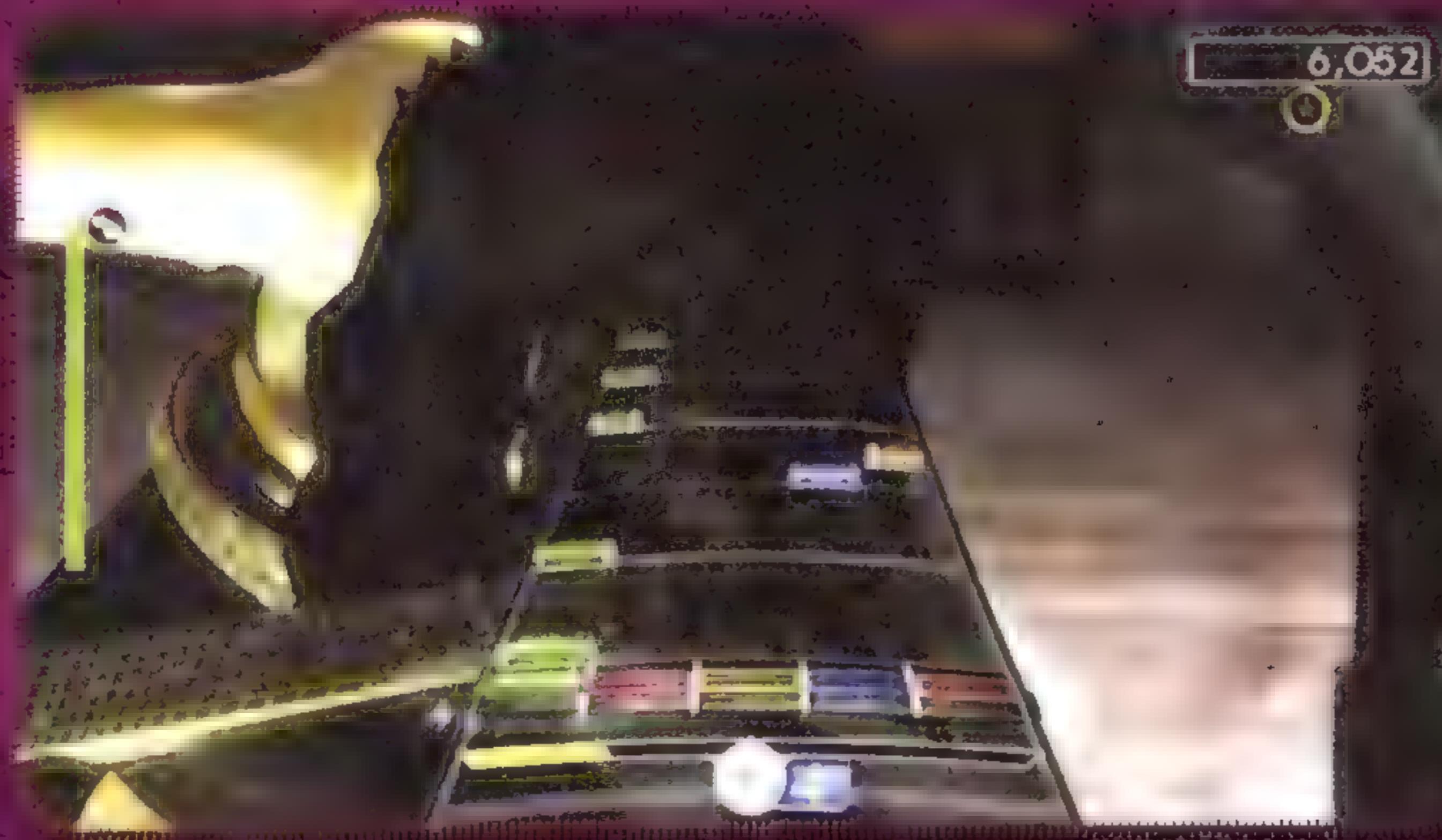
THE FIRST THING TO COME to grips with is... your grip. For one, keep it light; you might clench up just from anxiety, but try to keep your fingers and wrist loose. It's natural to place your index finger on the green (first) button, as in Figure A, and that works on Medium – four buttons, four fingers. But the only way you're going to feel comfortable with pressing the orange button is to move your default starting position. More often than not, you want your index finger over the red (second) button, and your pinkie hovering over the dangerous orange button – like Figure B. This is a good mental way to center yourself on the guitar, because you'll be able to feel the middle button's ridge or nubs (depending on which guitar controller you prefer) with your middle finger. When you get a riff that "anchors" itself around the green button, just shift back. It's also easier to stretch back to reach the green button with your index finger (as seen in Figure C) than it is to stretch ahead to reach the orange button with your pinkie – the main riff in "I Think I'm Paranoid" in *Rock Band* is a good time to try it.

Songs that use a lot of shifting power chords (two-button chords with a button in-between, like green-yellow) are prime benefactors of this technique. Of all the advice we can offer, this is probably the single biggest change to adopt; it really begins to pay off as you rise in difficulty.

Guitar Hero II
"Surrender"

Guitar Hero III
"My Name Is Jonas"
"Hit Me with Your Best Shot"

Rock Band
"Here It Goes Again"
"Gimme Shelter"



The Pinkie

YOUR LEAST DEVELOPED finger is the scourge of so many guitarists, and it's probably a huge stumbling block for you, too. But using your tiniest finger is key at the higher skill levels, so you really do need to start training it now.

What you want to remember here is that just because your pinkie can reach a button doesn't mean it should. Power chords

are a good example — some are better handled with your index and ring fingers, even though you could hit them with your pinkie. Always try it with your pinkie; if it's just too awkward, try switching. On the other hand, chords that span four buttons, such as green-blue and red-orange, should nearly always be played with the pinkie, as in Figure D.

On the other hand, there are some riffs that are simply designed for you to span all five buttons, and that means the pinkie gets put into service. The only thing that will make you comfortable is building it up, so don't neglect the finger — the songs were designed with it in mind, and the games really do expect you to use it.

Guitar Hero II
"Sweet Child O' Mine"

Guitar Hero III
"Talk Dirty to Me"

Rock Band
"Wanted Dead or Alive"
"Enter Sandman"



Slides

THIS ONE'S PRETTY SUBTLE and you won't encounter it in every song. Some notes are designed to play by sliding your hand between them. For instance, "Surrender" can actually be played this way — with the buttons pressed, just slide your hand up to the next chord without softening your grip. You'll find this on individual notes as well — watch out for quick green-to-red sequences that then continue up to orange, or the opposite of that, riffs that go all the way from orange down to green, such as "Story of My Life" in *Guitar Hero III* — those little pickup notes are

perfect for this. And on "Wave of Mutilation," if you're sliding correctly, you won't hear any gaps in the music when changing chords.

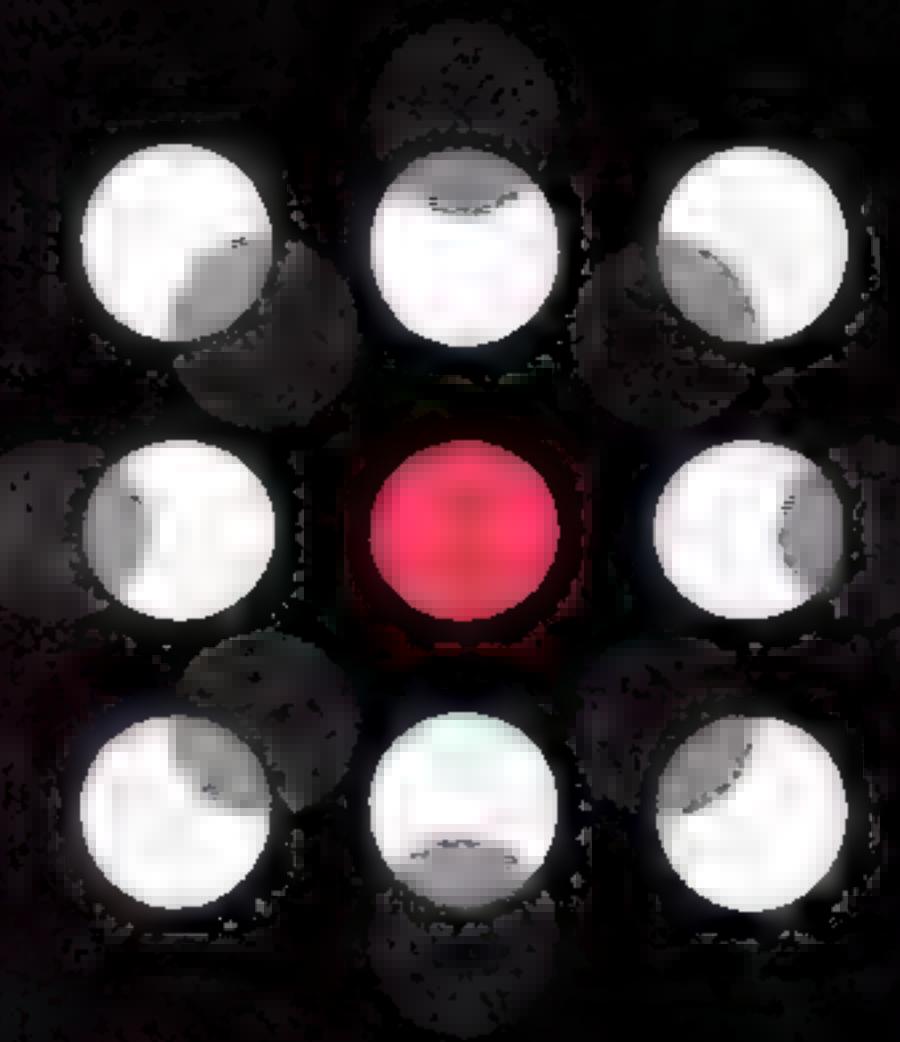
Guitar Hero II
"War Pigs"

Guitar Hero III
"Reptilia"

Rock Band
"Wave of Mutilation"

LESSON PLAN

In all these instances, you should play the songs on Hard, if not Expert. We've tried to point out the songs that offer the most helpful amount of repetition — in most cases, you'll find the technique in question in the main riff or at least in a recurring segment of the song. Other times, the tempo or relative difficulty of the song made it the best or easiest way to drill a specific technique. And while some of the downloadable tracks offer fantastic training examples, we didn't use any DLC for the lesson. Everything you need to dominate is right there on the disc.



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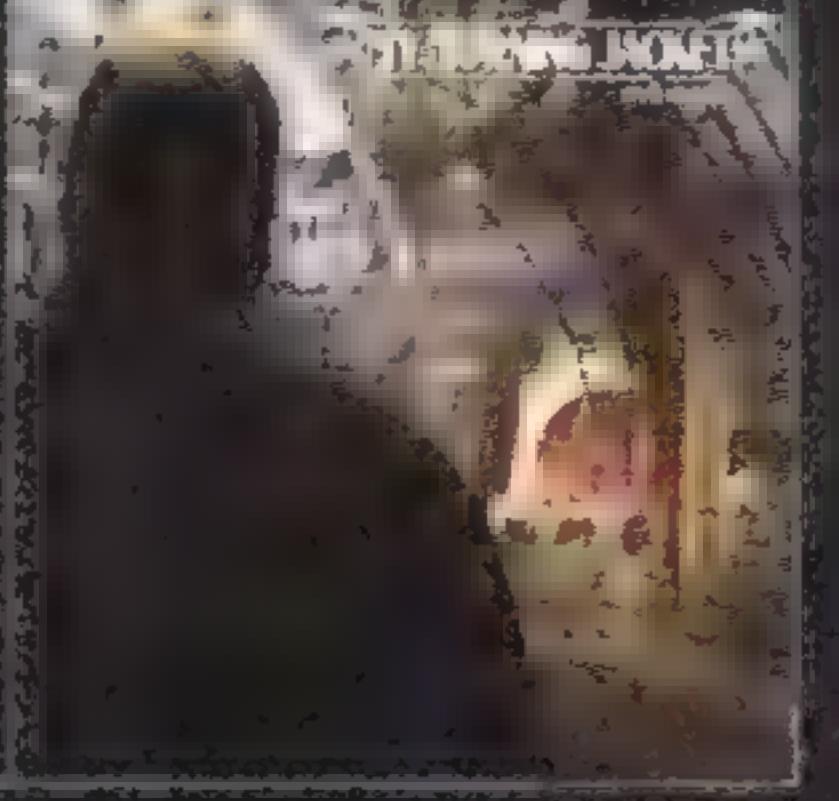


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MY MORNING JACKET *EVIL URGES*

Kentucky quintet My Morning Jacket skillfully redraw the classic rock blueprint, adding strange hallways and dark corners. They swaddle grizzled guitars in sheets of reverb, propelling their songs with pounding percussion and topping them with Jim James' unearthly howl. Their live shows are legendary: wild, wooly affairs that see their soulful songs expanding endlessly and incredibly. You can sense that same restless energy on My Morning Jacket's latest record *Evil Urges*, now available on eMusic. Whether it's the limber-limbed choogle of the title track or the full-on roar of "Remnants," My Morning Jacket make passionate music for passionate music fans. Don't call it "classic rock" – just call it classic.

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Hammer-Ons and Pull-Offs (HOPOs)

IN REAL GUITAR, a hammer-on is played when a note rings out just from the force of the fretting finger slamming down on the string – no strum necessary. A pull-off is the same move in reverse, where the note rings out from the movement of the finger leaving the string. In fake guitar, the physics and the concept is the same, but it's easier to do – and necessary.

Each of the three games gives you a small clue that a HO or PO opportunity is coming up. In *Guitar Hero*, it's a ring around the top of the jewel – if there's a black ring, you'll need to pick that note, but if there's no black ring, you can just move your fretting hand for those notes. (It's there in *Guitar Hero II* but tough to see; Neversoft beefed up this indicator for *GHIII*.) In *Rock Band*, all note markers are rectangular, but the narrower rectangles are HOPOs.

Just because you can do a hammer-on doesn't mean you need to. If you feel more confident picking the entire run, go for it. The HOPOs can be implemented later, after you have a command of the song's phrasing.

Guitar Hero II
"Woman"; "Possum Kingdom"

Guitar Hero III
"The Metal"; "Cliffs of Dover"

Rock Band
"Vaseline"; "Flirtin' with Disaster"

Alternate Picking/Strumming

WE LOVE THE RAMONES, but every song is not designed for punk-style downstrums. Watch any acoustic guitarist and you'll see they strum in both directions, up and down; same with any soloist, like Slash or Eddie Van Halen – those fast bits can only be achieved by picking the strings both up and down. You should do the same. This should be pretty obvious when you're faced with a monster line of notes on the same button, but many players try to kill these riffs with brute force and blind ambition. Neither works.

Your timing will be a little off when you start strumming up; there's a good chance all your up-strums will be late for a little while, as you adjust. Plan to practice a few times before busting this move in public.

Guitar Hero II
"Misirlou"

Guitar Hero III
"Knights of Cydonia"

Rock Band
"Creep"; "Ballroom Blitz"





Guitar Hero II "Who Was in My Room Last Night?" "XYZ"

Guitar Hero III "Cult of Personality"

Rock Band
"Highway Star"
solo on Expert
"Green Grass and
High Tides"

Triplets

• THESE GABOPING PARTIES require fast up-down-up or down-up-down strums. There aren't a ton of songs that use things like this – Iron Maiden and Metallica are prime offenders, and "Raining Blood" on Hand in Hell is probably the most infamous example – but if you're not properly prepared for a song that uses triplets, you'll literally never hear the end of it.

The best technique is to treat the strum lever with a light touch - flick it between your thumb and index finger, almost like you're playing catch with it. A PICKER is basically a three-fingered strum.

Guitar Hero III "The Trooper" (Xbox 360 only)

Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock

Rock Band: Run for the Hills (on Expert)

Cascades & Zig-Zags





Where Do ROCK BAND Songs Come From?

“DUDE, YOU KNOW WHAT SONG I WANT TO SEE IN *ROCK BAND*? ACTUALLY, YES, HARMONIX DOES KNOW. BUT TURNING WISHES INTO REALITY TAKES A LITTLE WORK.

» *By Dan Amrich*

Everybody has a pet song in *Rock Band*, and it's inevitable that your favorite track will be someone else's most hated. And let's face it - in this case, if the music sucks, so does the game. Finding the best songs for the majority of the audience is an impossible task - but what's Eric Brosius going to do? As the audio director for Harmonix, it's his freakin' job.

The Gear

The Guitarists

THE GAMES

35

SELECT SONG

Random Song
Let the crowd decide your next song!

WARMUP SONGS (5 SONGS)

Say It Ain't So
Weezer

In Bloom
Nirvana

I Think I'm Paranoid
Garbage

Mississippi Queen
As made famous by Mountain

WAITING FOR LEADER...

► It takes a lot of work to get here.

"We look for a bunch of different things," says Eric. "Ideally, every song would be a giant hit, four playable parts that are really fantastic, challenging for every instrument, and kick-ass in every way. That doesn't always happen. Some songs you get because they're a big hit and everyone loves them. Others you pick because they're a little more underground. And you say 'people should know about this song.' Others we pick for particular parts – a killer drum and bass part or a great guitar solo. In general we look for something that has four interesting parts to play – a good balance of repetition and variety, so that each part will have something cool to do."

"We also look for those songs that have those 'band moments' – those moments where it feels like everyone's together. You play a verse, a chorus, a verse, a chorus, and there's a breakdown, and some-

one screams and everybody jumps back in with a giant power chord. That's really fun. When you look around the room, you see everybody jump up in the air and smile."

So how do you make everybody jump and smile? Very carefully, and with a lot of patience. Eric walked us through the process of bringing *Rock Band* magic to the masses.

STEP 1 Brainstorming

As Lynyrd Skynyrd's Ronnie Van Zandt famously shouted before the live version of "Free Bird," "What song do y'all wanna hear?" Harmonix audio director Eric Brosius begins the song selection process by scouring fansites and forums for suggestions. Armed with a 3,000-song database, Eric analyzes, grades, and breaks the list down to 50 to 80 songs for

a larger committee to debate. They in turn discuss, campaign, and otherwise whittle down the list to a "dream list" of about 40 tracks or bands ("Sometimes it's not even specific songs – we want something by that artist"), regardless of whether or not those songs would be easily acquired. This paring-down process takes several months for each game, but it's pretty much ongoing, now that downloadable content is a priority.

STEP 2 Licensing

Send in the lawyers! The artists' representation is contacted to discuss permission and fees for the song's use. "We don't get everything we ask for," says Eric. "Some

artists are just not interested, for whatever reason." Some change their minds after seeing private game demos from Harmonix (see sidebar); other times, just having a powerful partner like MTV can help open otherwise stubbornly closed doors. "They brought a lot of firepower – and so far," Eric says with a laugh, "they haven't goobered us up too much."

Getting legal permission can take anywhere from weeks to months, and "we were still getting licenses three weeks before we finished the game," says Eric. Even when the licenses come through, Harmonix looks at the list to make sure it's balanced among different artists, genres, and eras of rock.

STEP 3 Remixing

With a deal in hand, Eric works with an engineer from the record label who has access to the multitrack master tapes or digital recording sessions. That is, assuming they still exist. "There are some songs we get approved, but nobody can find where the tape is," explains Eric. "Or you get stories like 'Oh, the tape was on a train that crashed into some other train, and blew up and the tape's gone and nobody knows where it is' – and then you find out it's actually at the old ex-manager's house. There's a lot of detective work that the labels do for us." Other times the original tracks can't be used because multiple instruments may have all been combined into one

SCHOOL OF ROCK

WHY ON EARTH WOULDN'T SOMEONE want their music in a game like *Rock Band*? "Usually, artists have a pool of lawyers and managers in front of them who basically deflect all this crap," explains Eric. "We had a couple cases where the band later found out. They called us up and said, 'We really want to be in your game!' And we're like, 'Oh, we tried to get you two months ago but you denied us...now it's kind of too late, I don't know if we can do it. We can try to do it.' We've heard some stories of managers and lawyers getting chewed out a bit."

Other times, it's a question of education. Some artists think "video game soundtrack" means bleeps and bloopers, which would be embarrassing. But showing the game is more effective than describing the game, so Eric says a personal demo often gets the message across best. "Most of the time, when we actually put the game in front of



► When stubborn bands see the context of how their music will be used, deals are often signed.

them, we can say 'We're going to treat it with respect, we're going to try to bring out the best part of your band with the game, and show off the song in a way that people are going to appreciate the music more.' And most of the time, they're like 'Yeah, we want to do this!'"

► Harmonix
and Wavegroup
recorded real
people singing
along with all the
songs on the disc.
Do really well and
you'll hear the
chanting of your
fans



> No song makes you feel like this; it's simply the best.

track - a very common occurrence in the late 50s and early 60s, as studio engineers tried to capture ambitious ideas on limited equipment. (Even the Beatles' magnum opus *Sgt. Pepper's* was created with a humble four-track recorder.)

Assuming the masters can be used, they're custom remixed for Eric's unique needs and digitized as a Pro Tools session. From here on, it's all Harmonix.

STEP 4 Implementing

"Once it gets here, we do a little bit of dressing up," says Eric, which

includes, say, mixing multiple guitar parts down to just what the game will use. And although there are only four player positions, you might be still be hearing seven to 10 discrete tracks of audio, which are then combined into just one track for efficient disc streaming.

Now it's a matter of mapping out the notes. For Expert difficulty, "we try as much as we can to do a note-for-note transcription," says Eric. "The drums are not that subjective - there's not that much interpretation. There's more with the guitar and bass, because we're trying to crunch 22 frets into five. There's a lot of time spent so that the way we

reduce it down to five frets feels like playing the guitar."

For the parts below Expert, notes are simply removed, and the “important” ones are retained. Eric says playing drums is “more about the independence of your limbs,” so the easier paths let you move, say, your right foot and right arm in sync instead of making them work independently. The final playing patterns go through several iterations based on the order of the presentation, so earlier Easy songs are simpler than the later Easy songs. The game constantly tries to train you for the next skill level up.

The completed note maps are

encoded as MIDI data. *Rock Band* then runs that data in sync with the music. That MIDI file also triggers lighting changes, camera angles, and animations, such as the singer's stage-dive at the final chorus of "Learn to Fly." Artists create those elements, but since the audio team knows the songs measure by measure, they program the MIDI file to tell the game what to show and when.

From there, it's tested by the QA team and ultimately either burned to disc or prepped for release as downloadable content. By the time it hits your Xbox, it's been the work of several people over several months. ☺



TURFING JAPANESE

THEY WERE GUITAR
GAMING BEFORE
GUITAR HERO—

BUT UNLESS YOU WERE LIVING IN JAPAN,
YOU PROBABLY NEVER REALIZED IT.
HERE'S WHAT YOU MISSED.

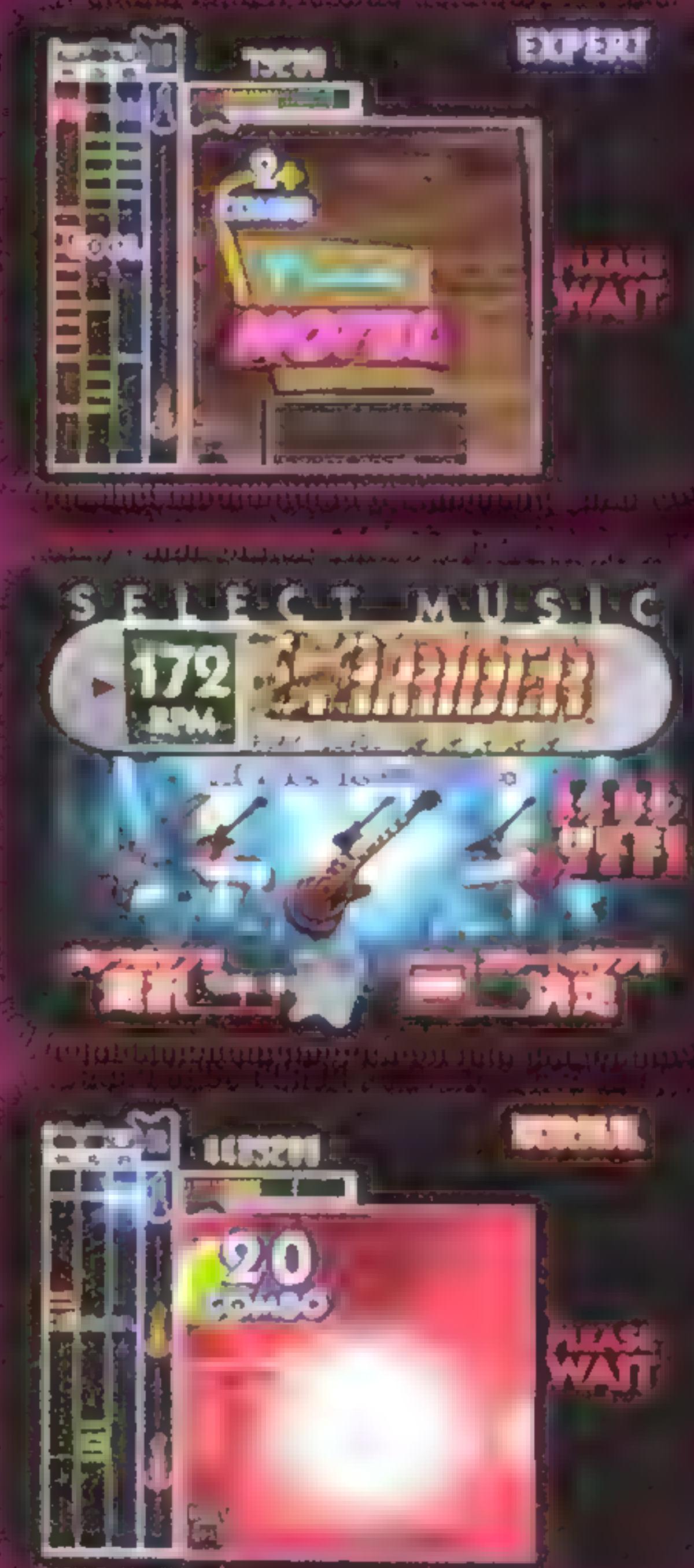


GuitarFreaks

Konami • Arcade, PlayStation • 1999

When it comes to music games, most people think of

Konami's *Dance Dance Revolution*, but not as many know about its six-stringed cousin, *GuitarFreaks*. Well, okay, it's got three buttons instead of six strings, but it does bear a strong resemblance to the *Guitar Hero* games we know and love today – scaled-down guitar-shaped controller, strum lever, and a series of colored lines on the screen that match the buttons. A home version came out for PlayStation in Japan only, but the coolest part of the original coin-ops (some of which did find their way to American arcades) was the ability to link it up with another one of Konami's music games, *DrumMania*, and jam. Nine versions of *GF* have appeared for Japanese home consoles over the last eight years, so it's not too surprising that Konami's finally entering the U.S. market this year with *Rock Revolution*.



NORMAL

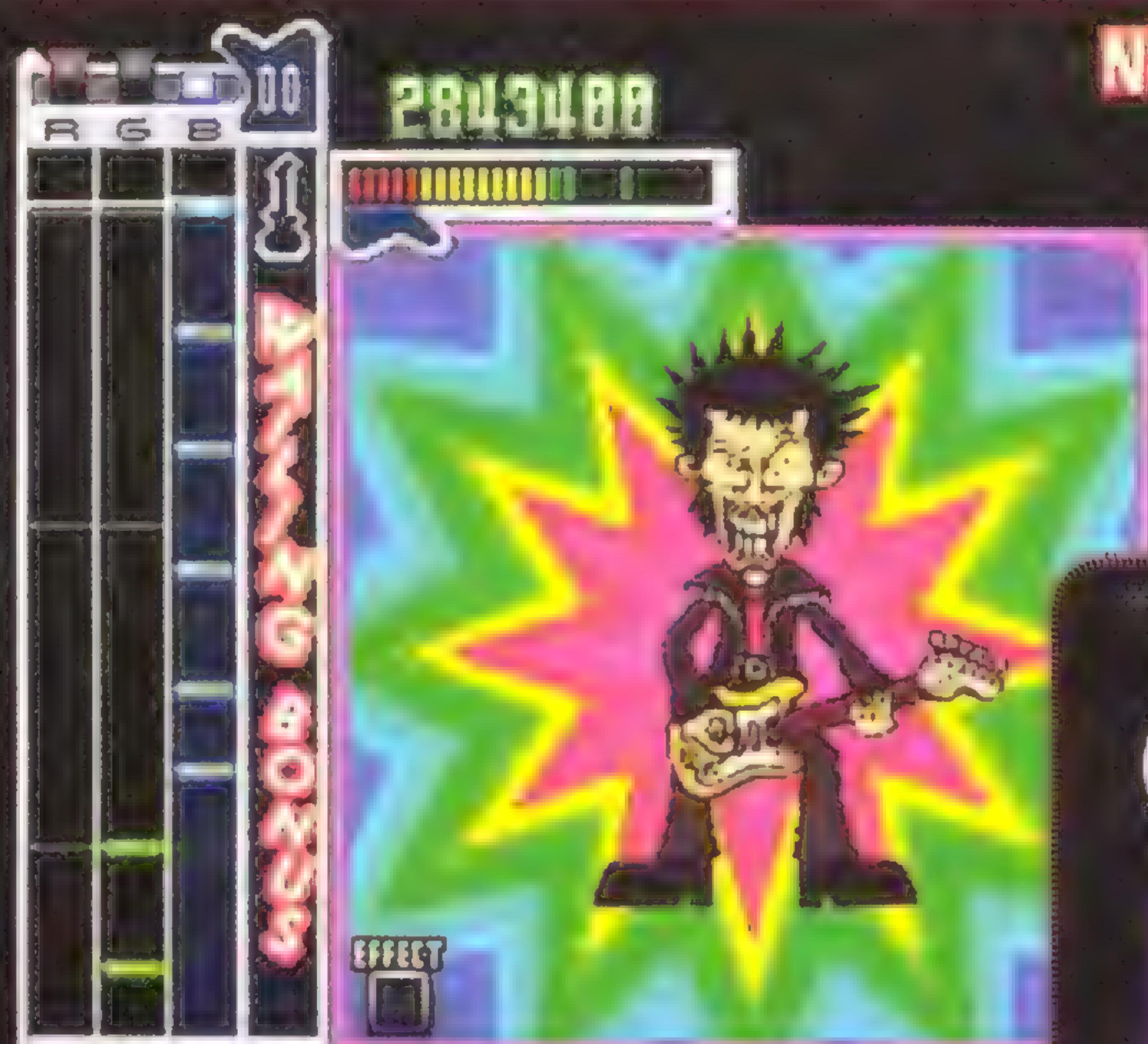
PLEASE

SELECT PLAY MODE

GIG
x 3 STAGE

EXPERT

PLAY LEVEL



The Gear

The Guitarists

THE GAMES

43



Um Jammer Lammy

Sony • PlayStation • 1999

After the success of the hip-hop game *PaRappa the Rapper*, Sony brought out a guitar-themed sequel. *Um Jammer Lammy* follows the exploits of a little lamb who's lost her rock confidence, but finds it again as she tackles strange follow-the-leader challenges from local firefighters, day-care centers, and lumberjacks – you know, like you'd expect. The music is catchy, the scenarios are silly, and pressing complicated strings of buttons in rhythm actually proves quite difficult as the game goes on. Like *GuitarFreaks*, an arcade version of *Um Jammer Lammy* appeared in Japan, as did not one but two real-life guitars based on the game. Fernandes decorated a ZO-3 travel guitar with Lammy graphics, then created the UJL-2000 – a full-size, short-scale reproduction of Lammy's yellow guitar. Sorry, fans: Neither were officially released in the States.



UJL-2000



NECK : 609mm Short Scale, 22F.

PICK UP : FP-100 × 3

CONTROL : 1 Volume, 2 Tone, 3 Way Toggle-SW.



Gitaroo Man

Koei • PlayStation 2 • 2002

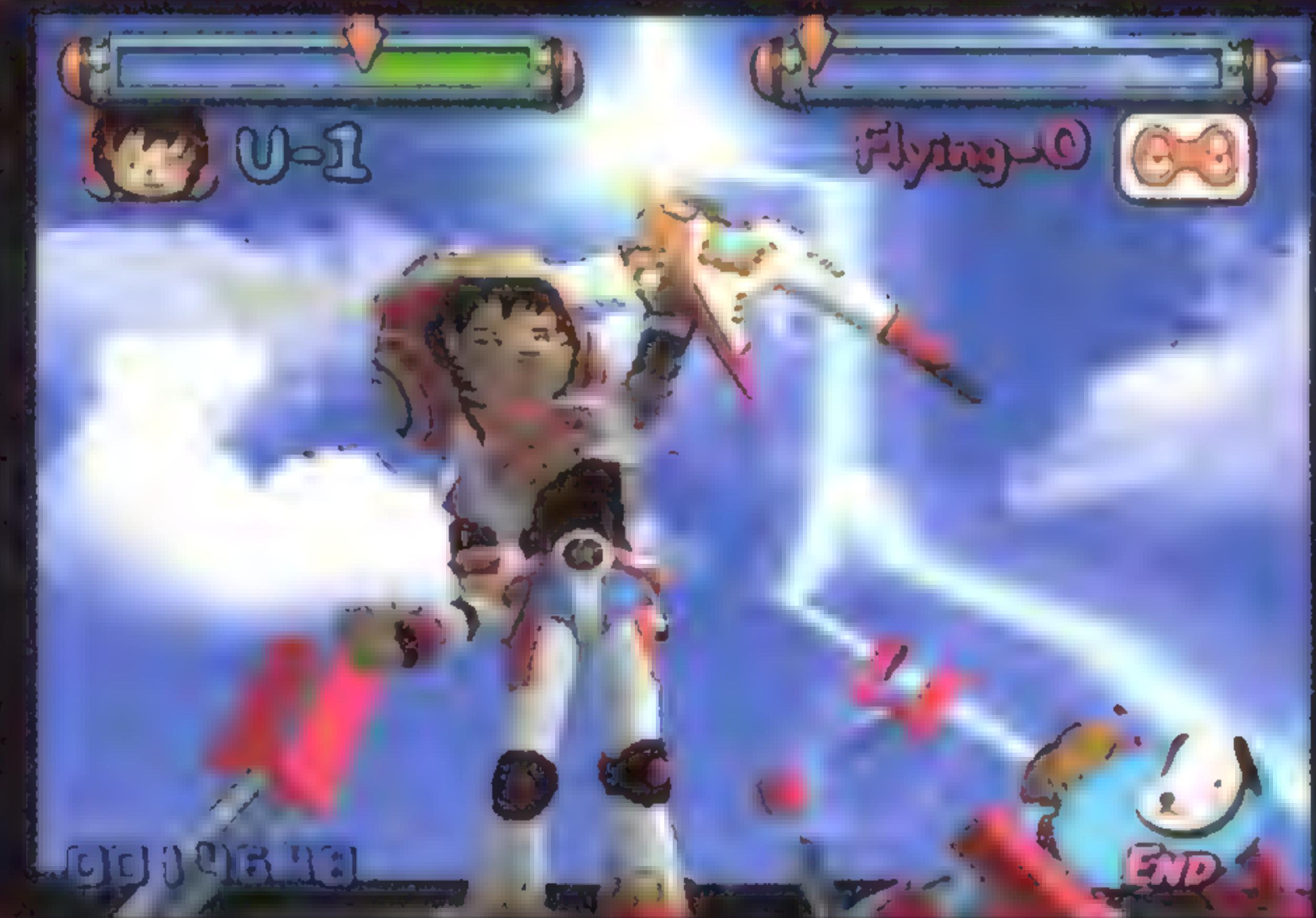
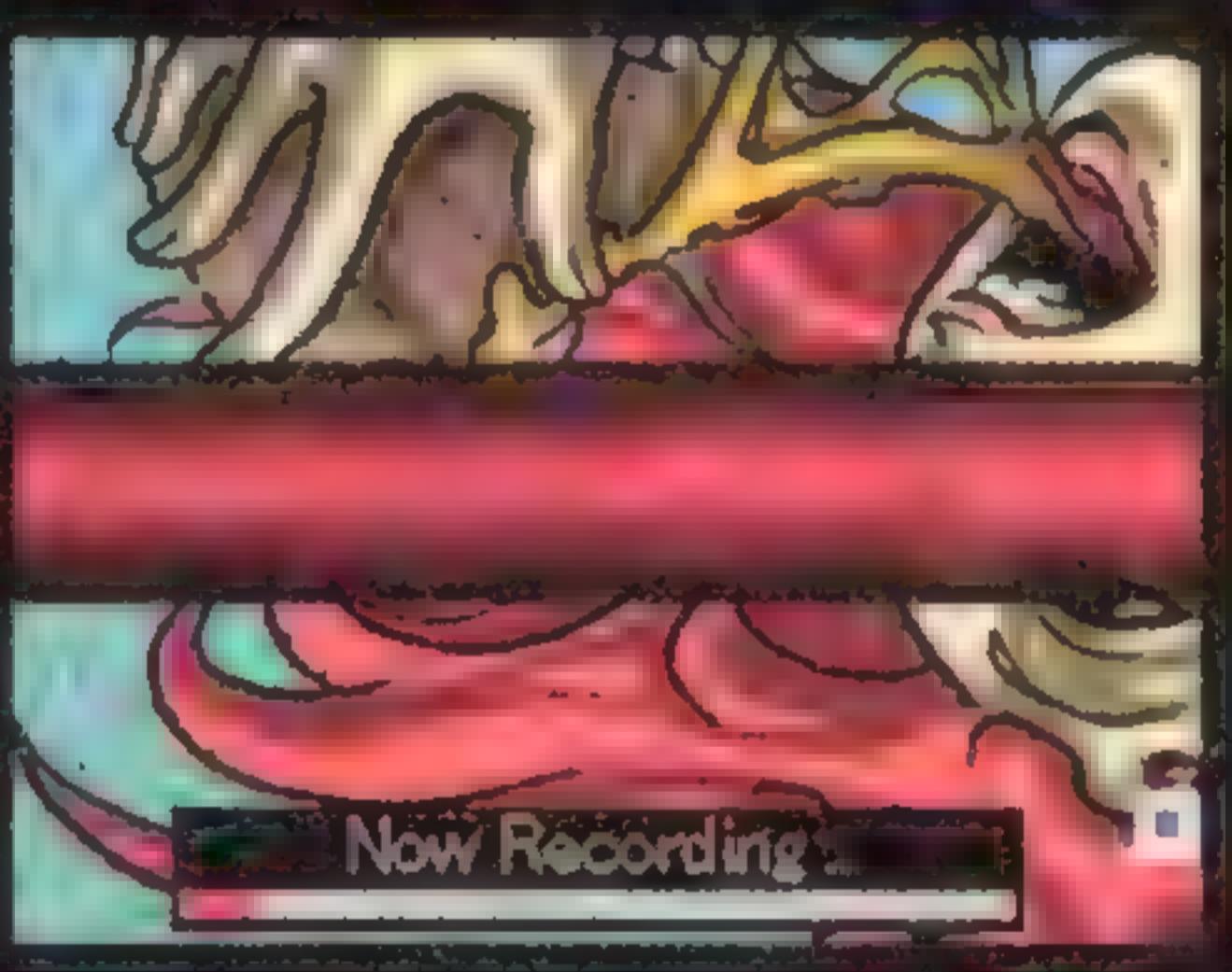
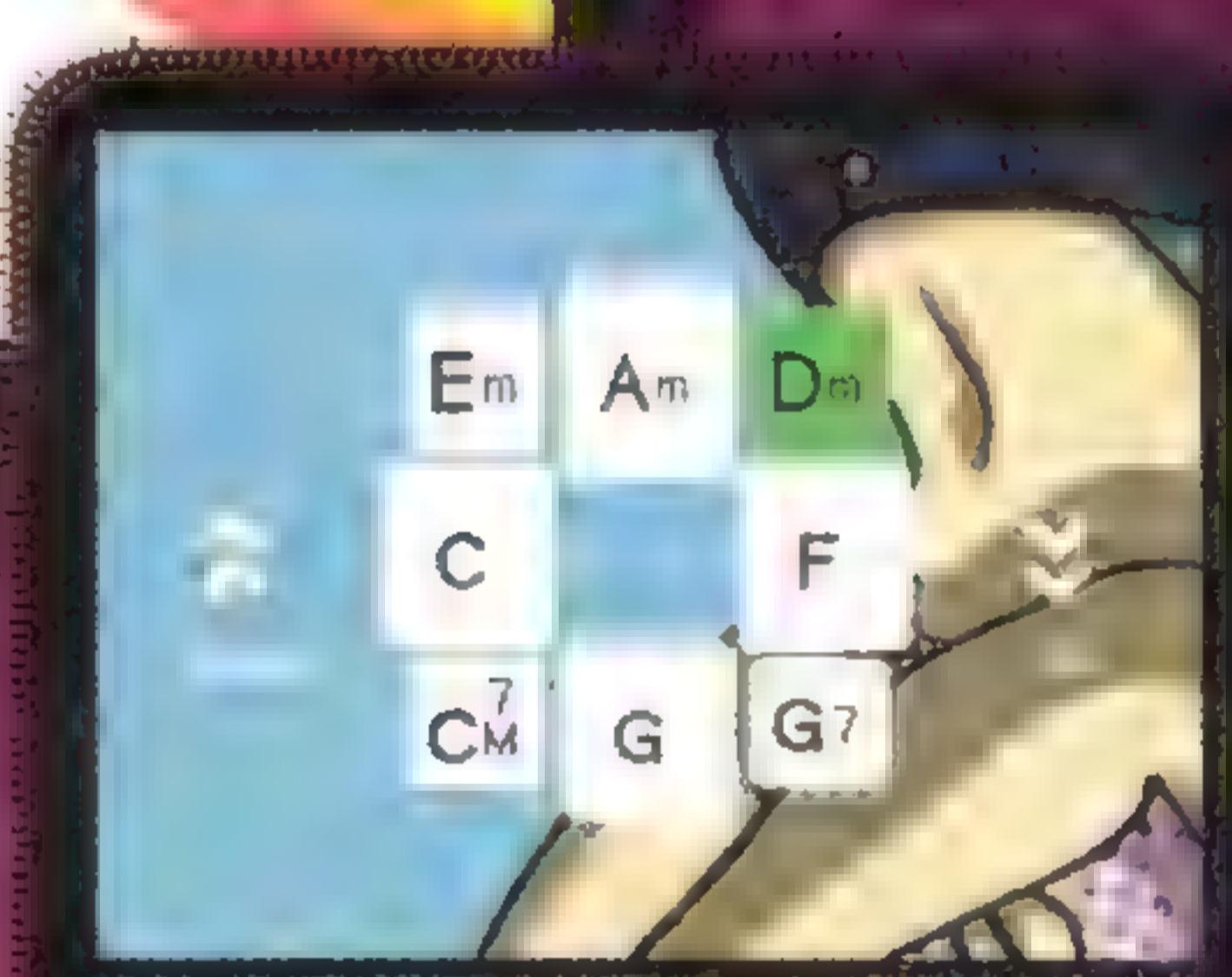
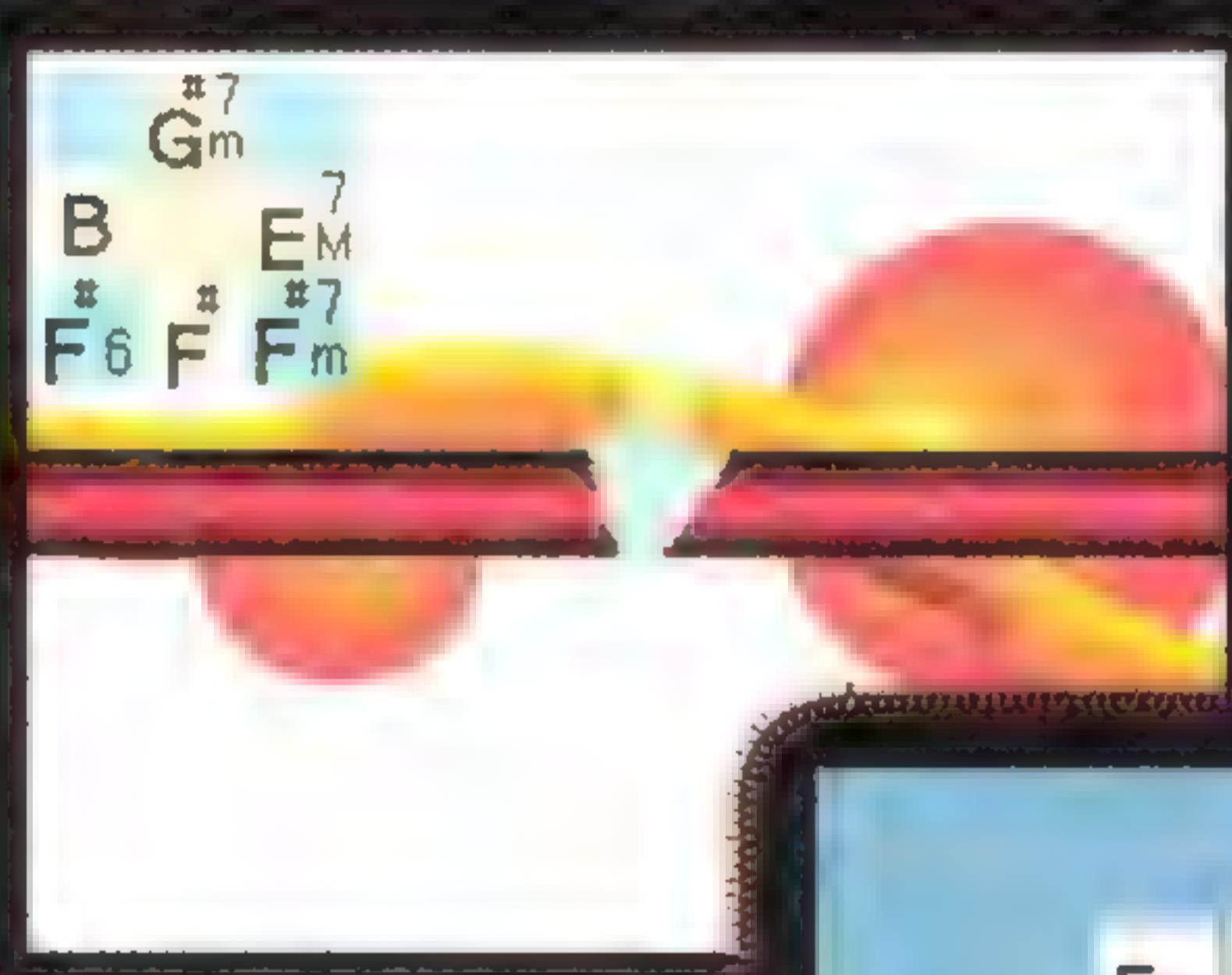
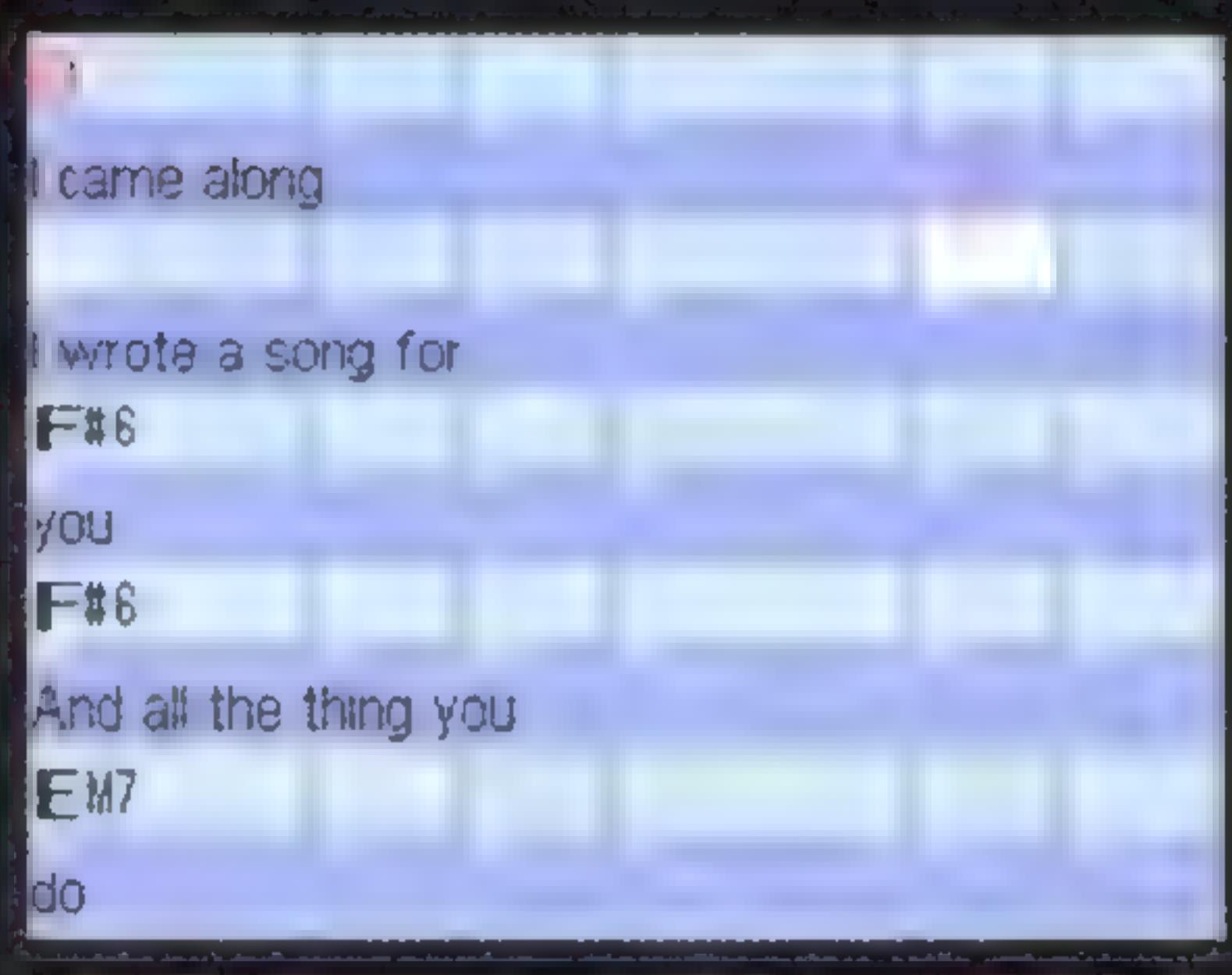
"A Gitaroo is a weapon!" It's combat! It's war!" Such is the advice of your trusty pet dog in *Gitaroo Man*, another very strange, very Japanese game, but its story should strike a common chord: You play U-1, a shy little boy who dreams of going out with Little Pico. Naturally, if you want the girls to notice you, you gotta pick up a guitar. Except when U-1 does it, he turns into Gitaroo Man, intergalactic hero of shred, complete with space armor, a winged helmet, and an instrument that blasts enemies with lightning bolts. Picture Ace Frehley as seen through the eyes of a heavily medicated twelve-year old from Osaka, and you've got the idea. (The dog's got an alter ego, too: the in-jokey AC-30.) Playing the game is nothing like playing a guitar; you have to trace a line on the screen with one of the analog sticks and press a button when cued, slowly collecting the mythical Gitaroos with each battle. If you've got a PSP portable system, look for the handheld port of this oddball under the title *Gitaroo Man Lives*.



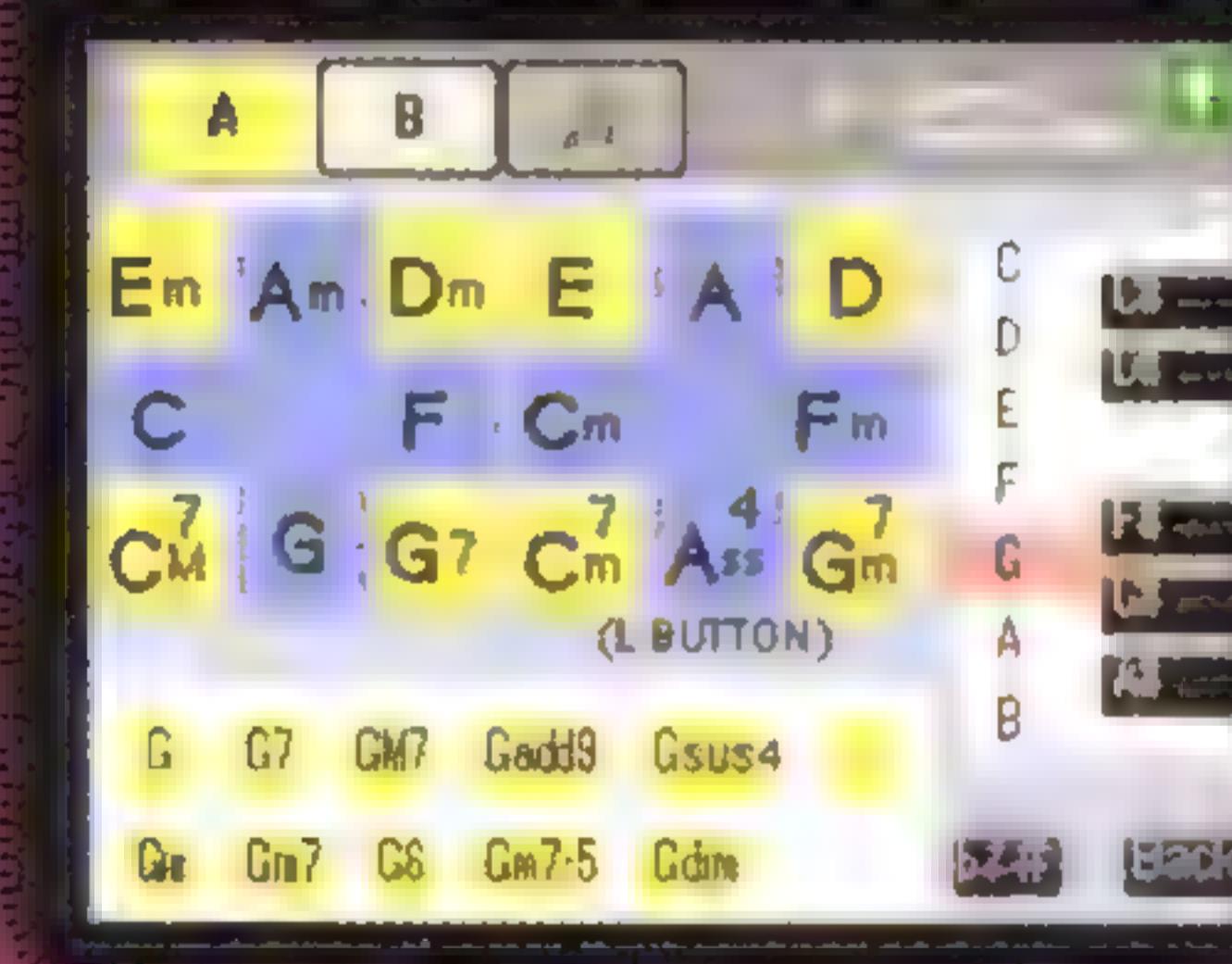


Jam Sessions

Ubisoft • Nintendo DS • 2007



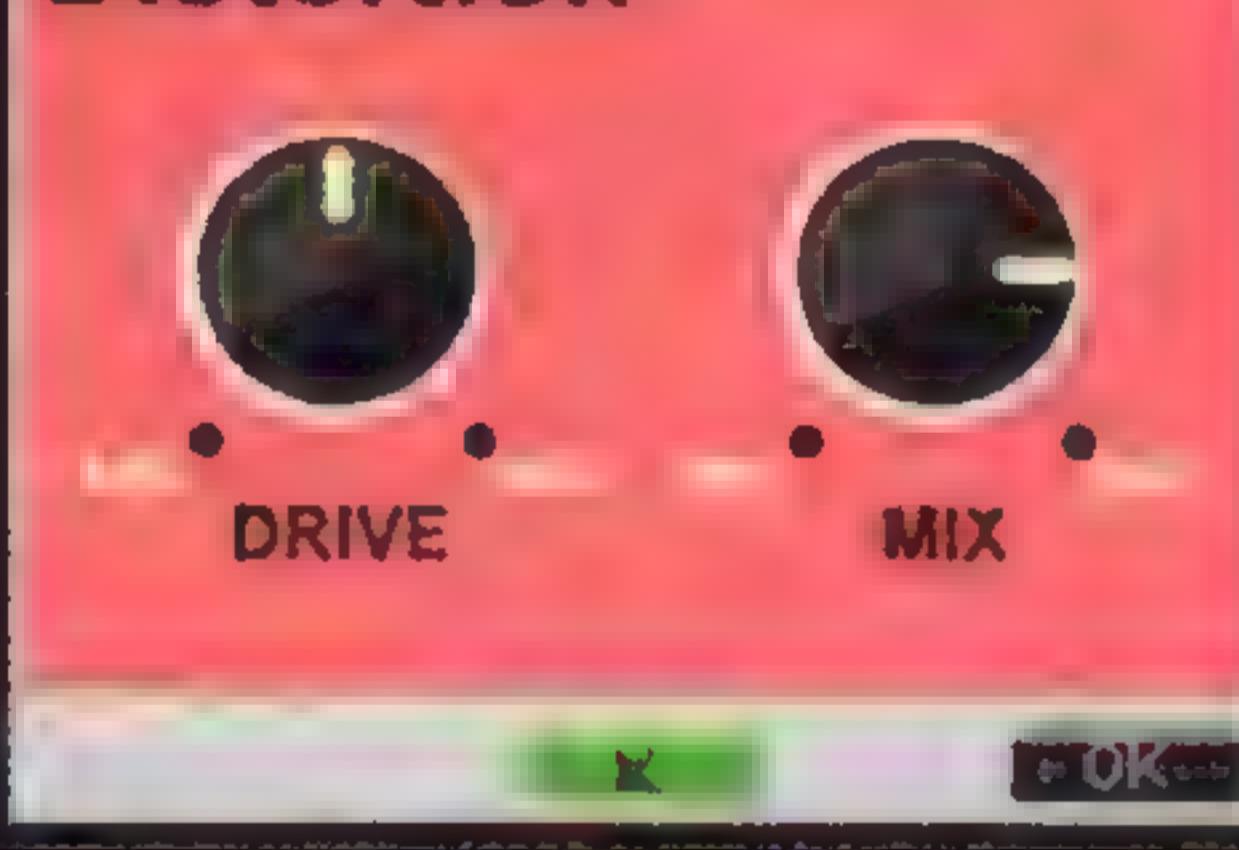
*The right side of the Touch Screen represents the notes C - B. Touch a note to see 10 chord variations. Drag and drop the chords into the chord palette's frame.
*If you want to erase a chord from the palette, touch the empty YELLOW square and drag it into a palette space.



DISTORTION
This effect gives your sound that extra rock n' roll crunch!

Find your sonic sweet spot by adjusting the DRIVE and MIX knobs.

Distortion

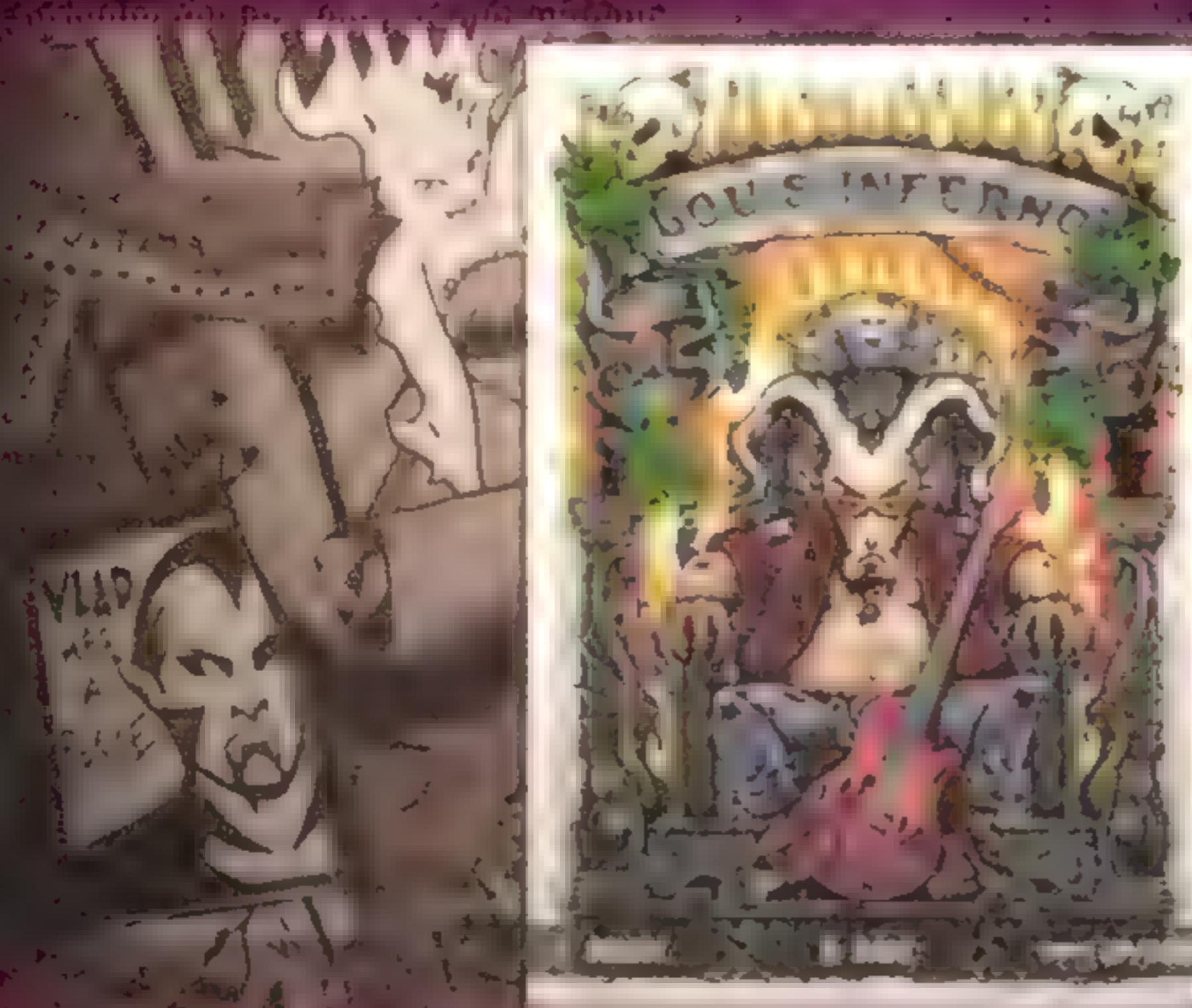




CONQUER GUITAR HERO III!

CAN'T SEEM TO CONQUER LOU IN THE FINAL DUEL? WE'LL SHOW YOU HOW – BEATING THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS.

» *By Dan Amrich*



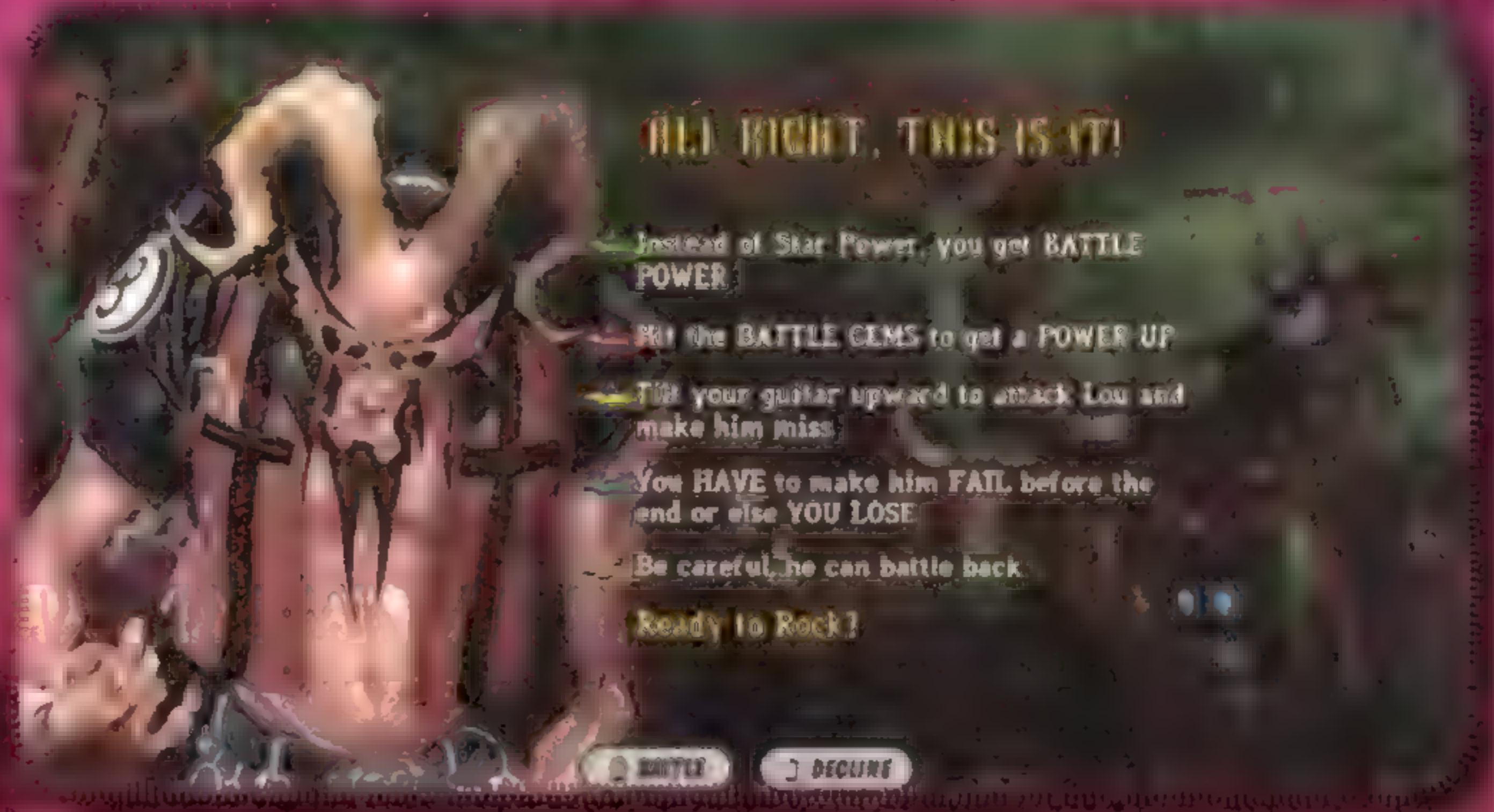
► **GUITAR HERO III'S HIGHEST SKILL LEVEL** is Expert – but believe it or not, it's actually tougher to complete the game a step lower, on Hard. Because of this paradox, lots of players have been banging their heads against a wall instead of simply banging their heads out of pure rock awesomeness. Fret no more: Help has arrived.

► **THE GAME'S FINAL STAGE** takes place in Lou's Inferno; you'll need to survive Battle Mode against the devil himself. In Battle Mode, you and another guitarist trade attacks with each other, trying to make the other person mess up. On Expert, Lou plays many more notes, so it's easier to make him miss them...but on Hard, the note density is lighter, so it's actually much easier for him to recover after one of your attacks. It will still probably take you a few tries to defeat him on Hard, but it will certainly take you less time if you follow this advice.



► **THE FINAL SONG** – “The Devil Went Down to Georgia” – doesn't appear anywhere else in the game, but Activision made it available as a free download on Xbox Live and PSN. Look for the Boss Battle Track Pack in Xbox Live Marketplace (or just select Downloadable Content from the game's menu). This is the only way to break the song down into segments in Practice mode...and you're going to need to do that.

► **PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION** to Devil Solo B, D, F, and H – you'll play these segments in the head-to-head battles during the actual game, while Lou does the others. They're full of hammer-ons and four-note sweep runs; it's all in your left hand on this one. Keep woodshedding these segments until you feel comfortable and have memorized the flow of the song; you won't have the easy “Devil Solo A” text on the screen during the real game, so you'll just have to remember what's what. Do the same thing for the Victory Solo segments B, D, F, and H. You'll wind up attacking Lou here, so take note of what his segments ((C, E, G, and so on) look and sound like – you'll need to know your best openings to shut him down during the final battle.





► **IN DEVIL SOLO A**, Lou will earn his first attack. He'll unleash it on you in Solo B, your first solo segment. Unfortunately, that's also your first chance to earn an attack, and you really need it. With any luck (and it is random), Lou will throw you something like Whammy, Broken String, or Level Up; any of those can be (relatively easily) overcome before the starred phrase appears. If your gauge is far enough into the green, you can stop playing the rest of the riff, grab the power-up when the stars appear, then recover. Look for the stars at the end of one of the sweeps and at the beginning of the next – they're easy to miss.

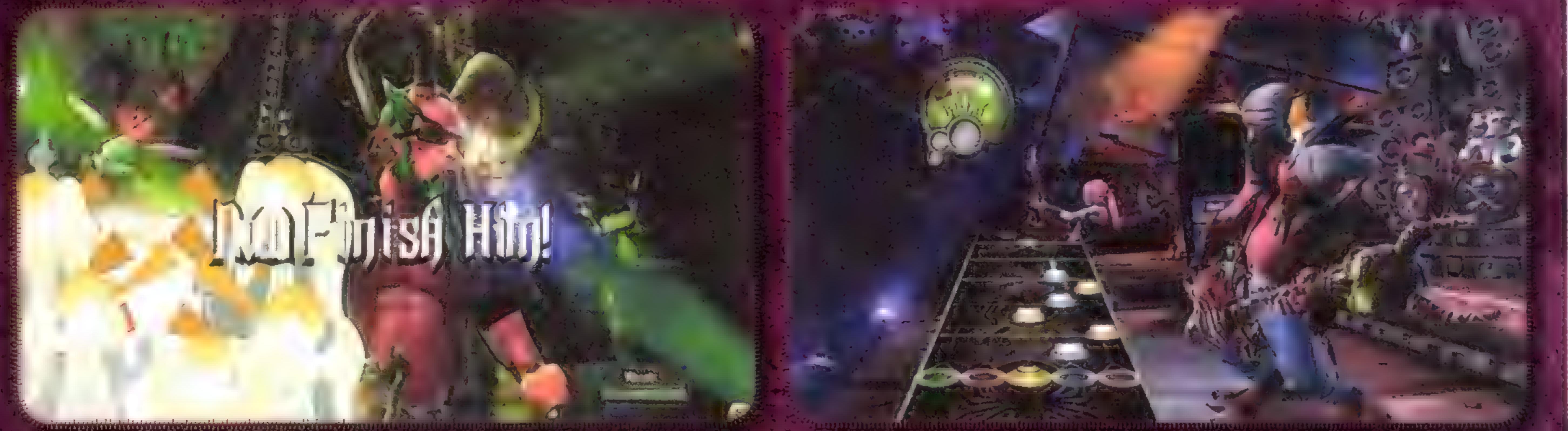
► **Solo C and Solo D** are as close to a breather as you get at this stage of the battle. You won't have to worry about earning, launching, or defending an attack here; just focus on accuracy and getting your Rock gauge back up to full.

Lou comes back with Solo E and will earn his second attack. If you're lucky, he'll throw it at you while you're playing the main riff and you can recover quickly. Of course, he might launch it during Solo F, your next section. You've got a slow orange-to-green five-note starred riff to nail here; it's a little slower than the rest of the shredding you've been doing, so be ready for it and don't rush through it.

► **Solo G is Lou's**, and he'll earn a third attack power-up. You'll be tempted to return fire here, but don't – it's imperative that you play conservatively, hoarding your attacks and simply staying alive throughout the entire Devil's Solo section. Your third opportunity to earn an attack will appear here near the end of your segment, as a starred riff that sweeps from yellow to orange. Earning it will put you in excellent shape for what lies ahead.

When the vocalist chimes in, take a look at your Rock meter. If you only see one power-up there, you probably won't make it; keep playing and learn some patterns from the experience. If you've stacked two attacks in reserve, you've got a fighting chance. And if you were able to hoard all three, this could be over in a hurry.

► **IT'S LOU'S HOUSE** so he gets to go first again; your rhythm part is the tricky triplets again. Very soon after you start your part, Victory Solo B, you'll have another attack opportunity – and that's your cue to unleash the fury. When Lou begins Solo C, throw all of your stored attacks one after the other – you simply want to bury him in difficulty. Never send a lone attack at Lou – he can always recover from them one at a time, but will only start to stumble (and miss his own starred riffs) when you send two or three bombs in rapid succession.



► **THE VICTORY SONG OFFERS YOU** two attacks in each of your segments, so if Lou doesn't go down fast, keep playing and store up your power-ups and repeat your existing technique – throw multiple attacks his way whenever you've earned two or three in reserve. Don't even look at Lou's Rock meter to see how close he is to falling: if he's still playing, you're obviously not done!



► **BATTER LOU WITH ENOUGH** attacks and he'll go down...but he's not out. Lou will get woozy and you'll be commanded by on-screen text to finish him. You'll need to play a little longer, but it's no trickier than anything else you've survived up to this point – a few more well-placed notes and you can officially say that *Guitar Hero III* put you through Hell!



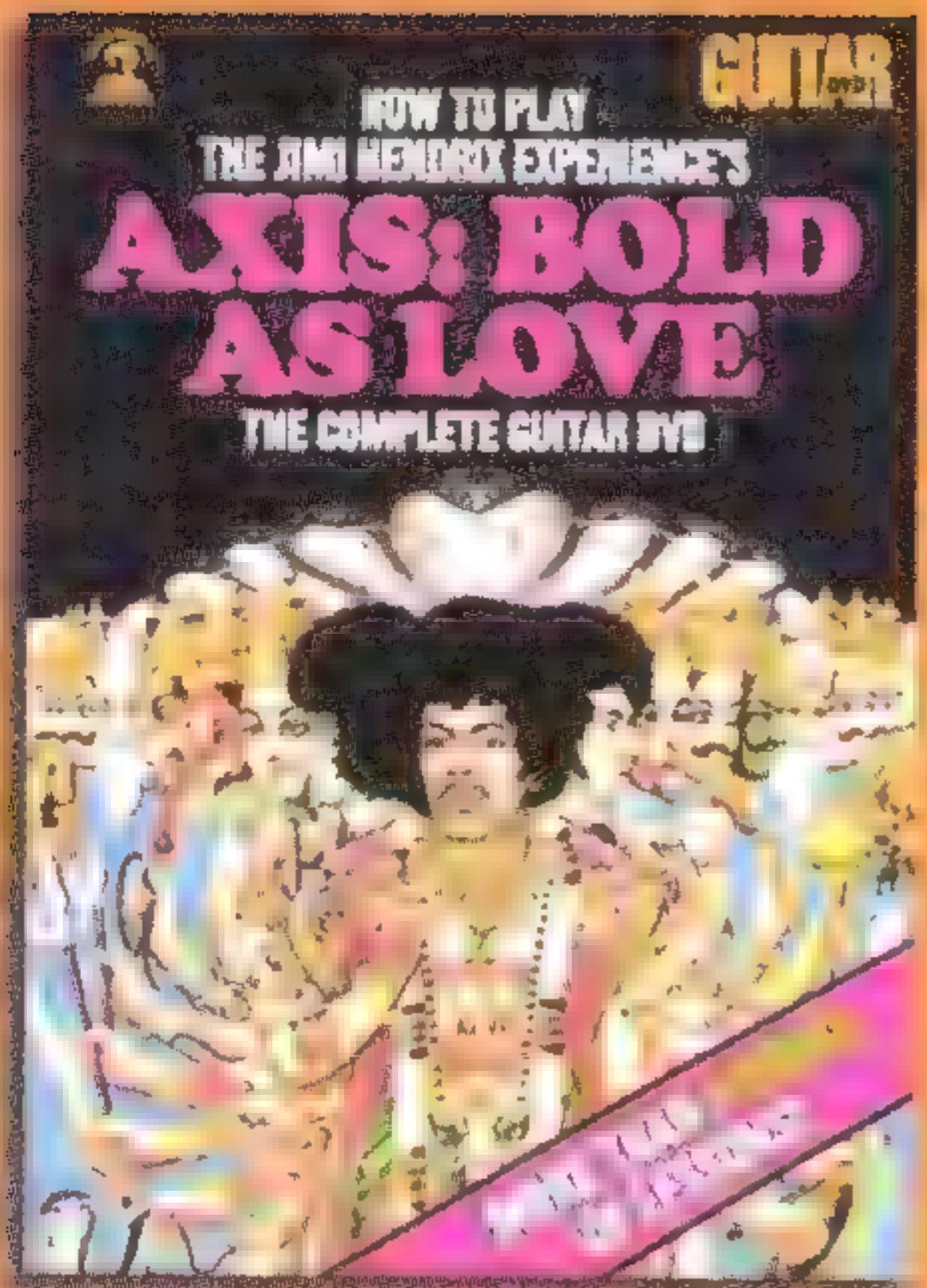
GUITAR DVD

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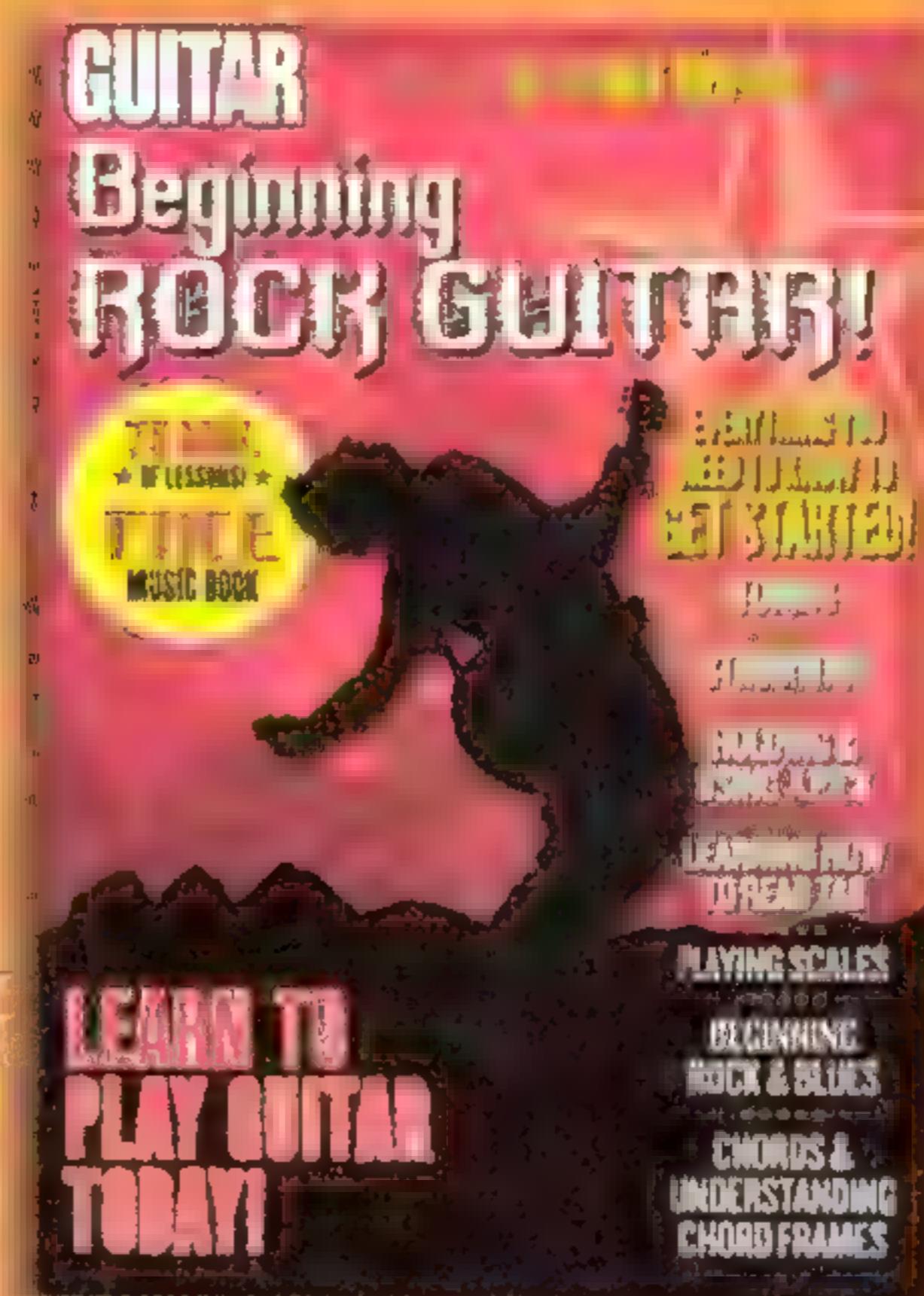
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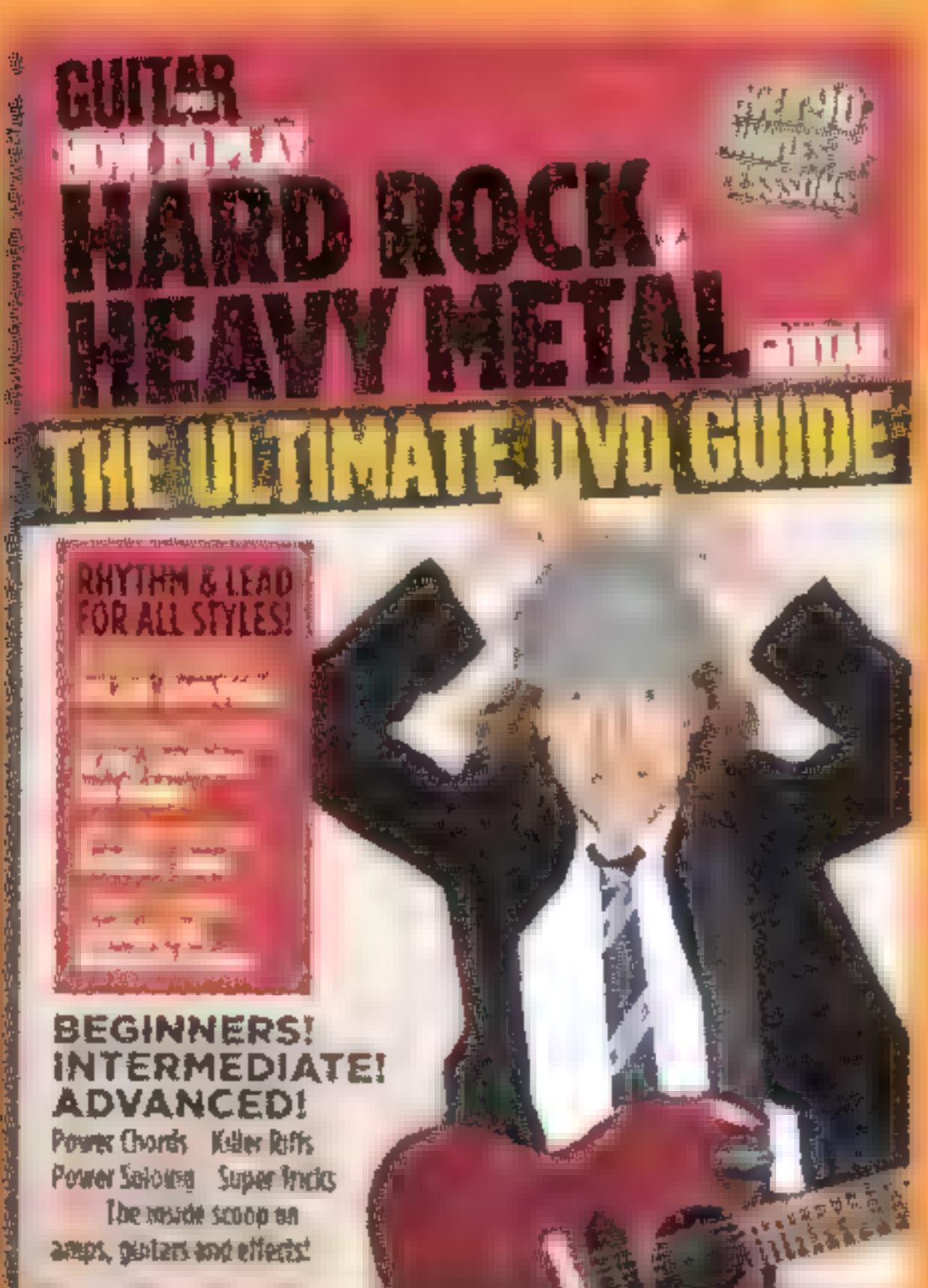
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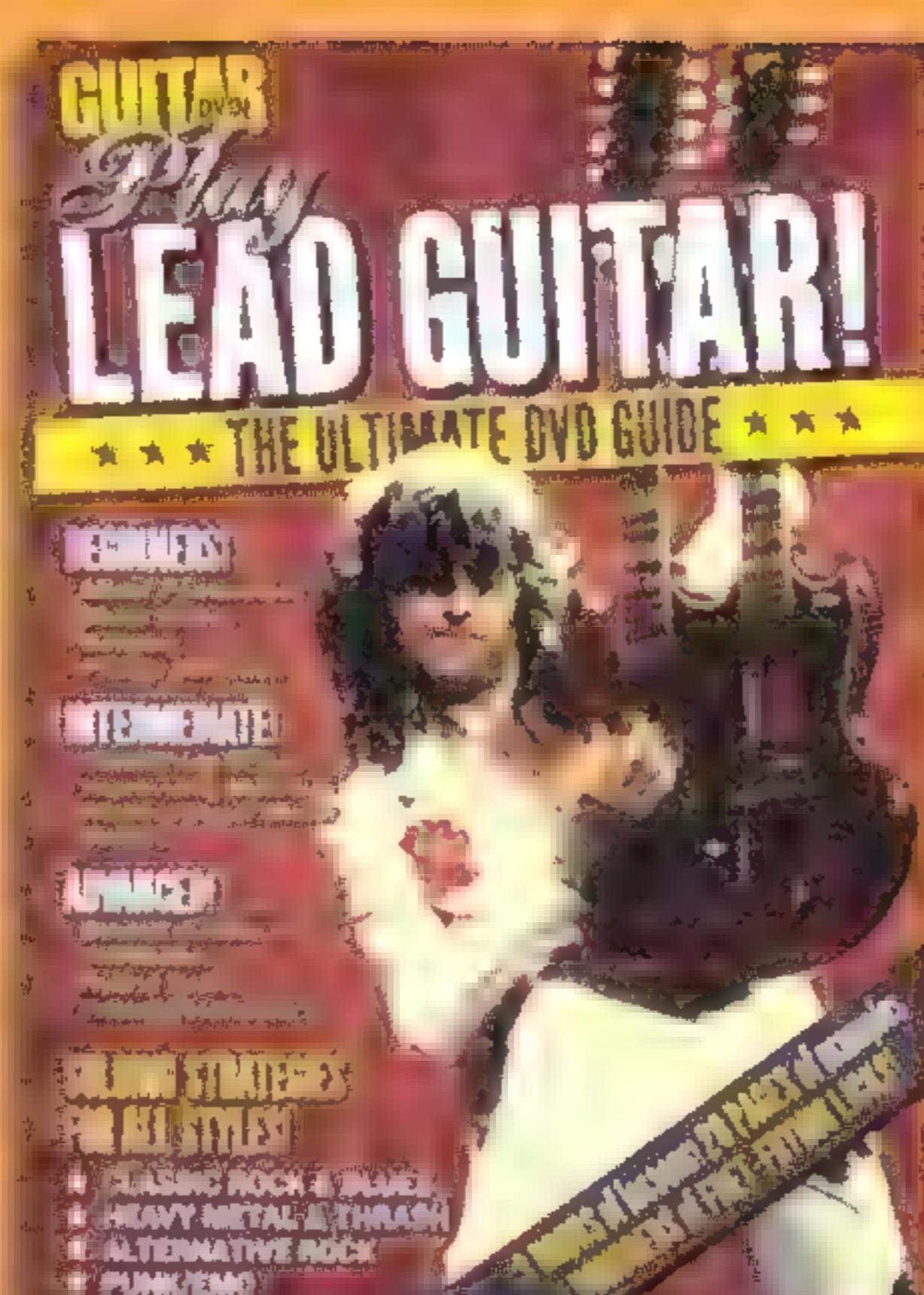
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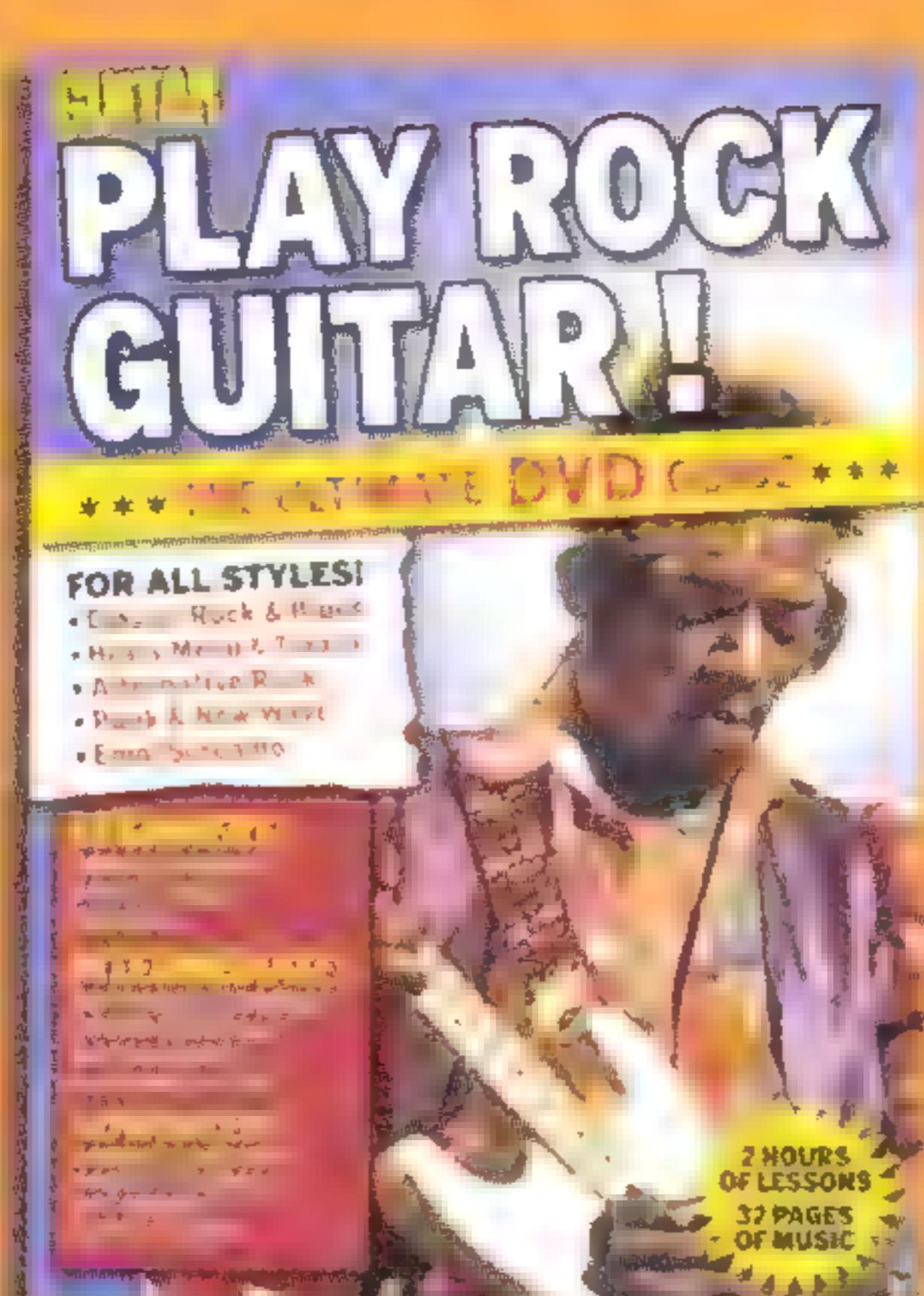
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Over 3 hours of lessons



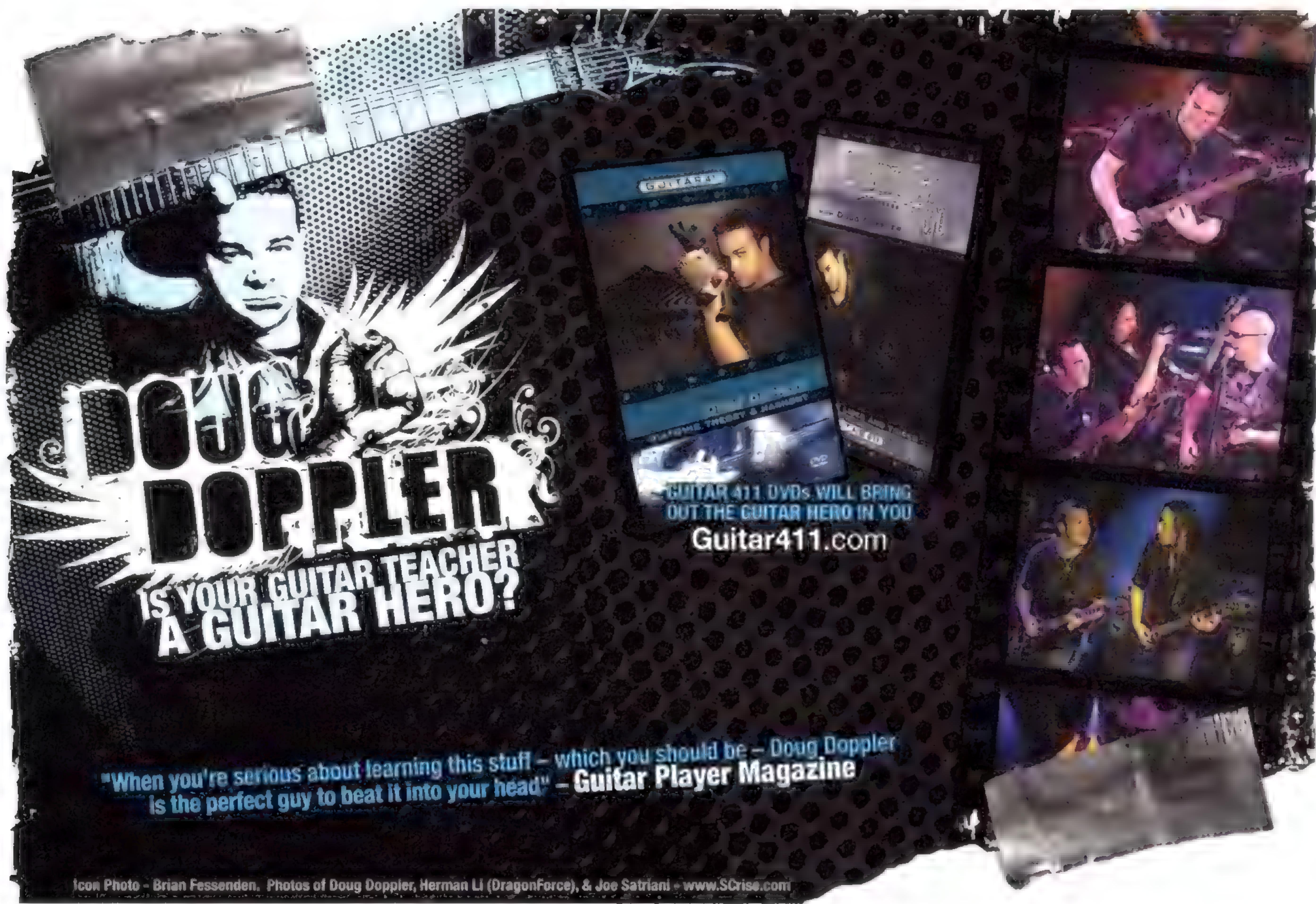
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Rare Hendrix footage
Over 3 hours of lessons



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GUITAR GAMING CHEATS

WHO SAYS PRACTICE IS THE ONLY WAY TO THE TOP? ARMED WITH THESE CHEAT CODES, YOU CAN BEND GUITAR HERO AND ROCK BAND TO YOUR WILL - OR, IF YOU'VE ALREADY BEATEN THE GAME, HAVE SOME FUN SCREWING AROUND.

Playstation II

► Guitar Hero

Enter these codes on the guitar controller at the main menu. You don't have to strum – just push the buttons in the right order. If it doesn't work, press them faster. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly. To deactivate the cheat, just enter it a second time.

► AIR GUITAR (GUITAR IS INVISIBLE)

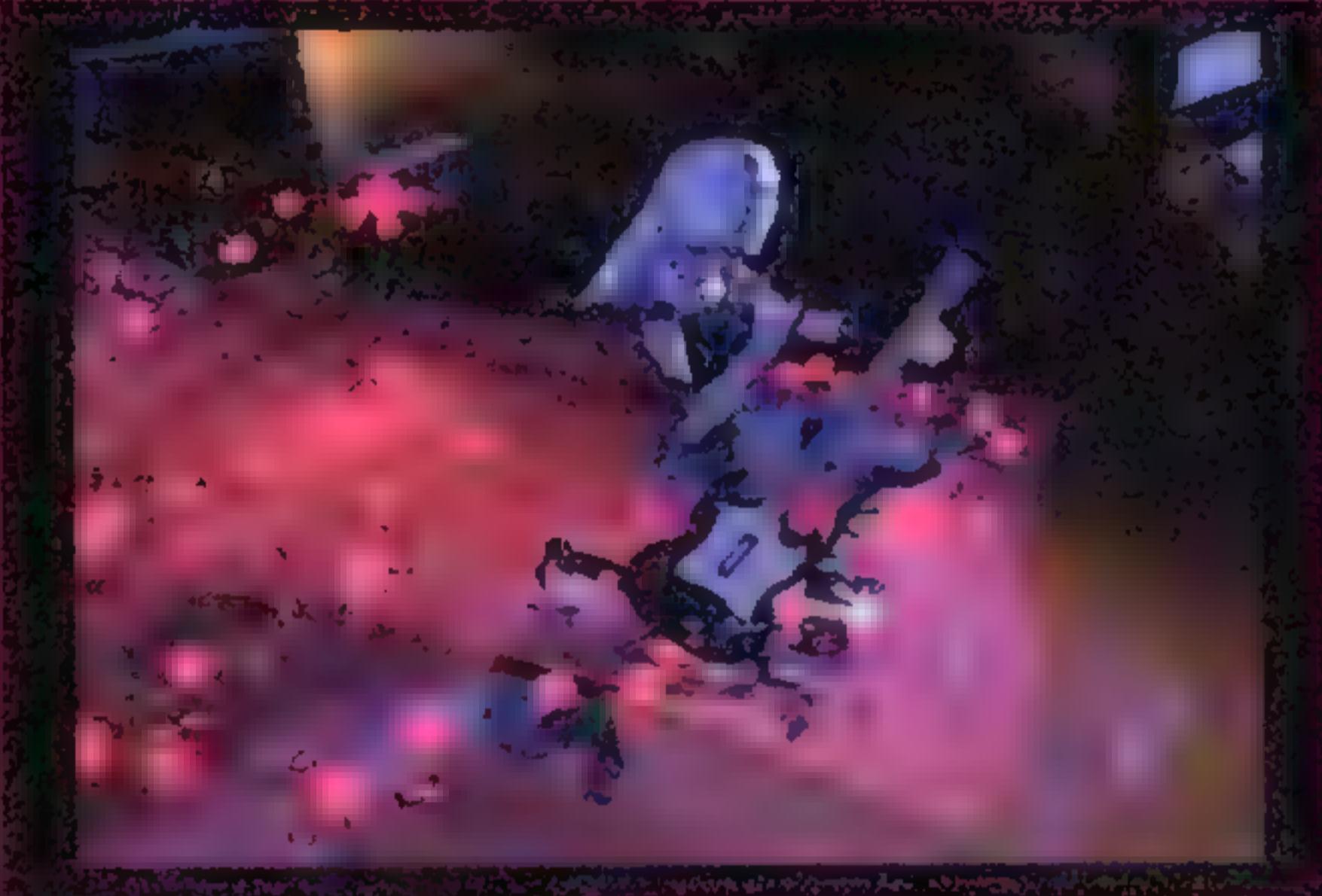
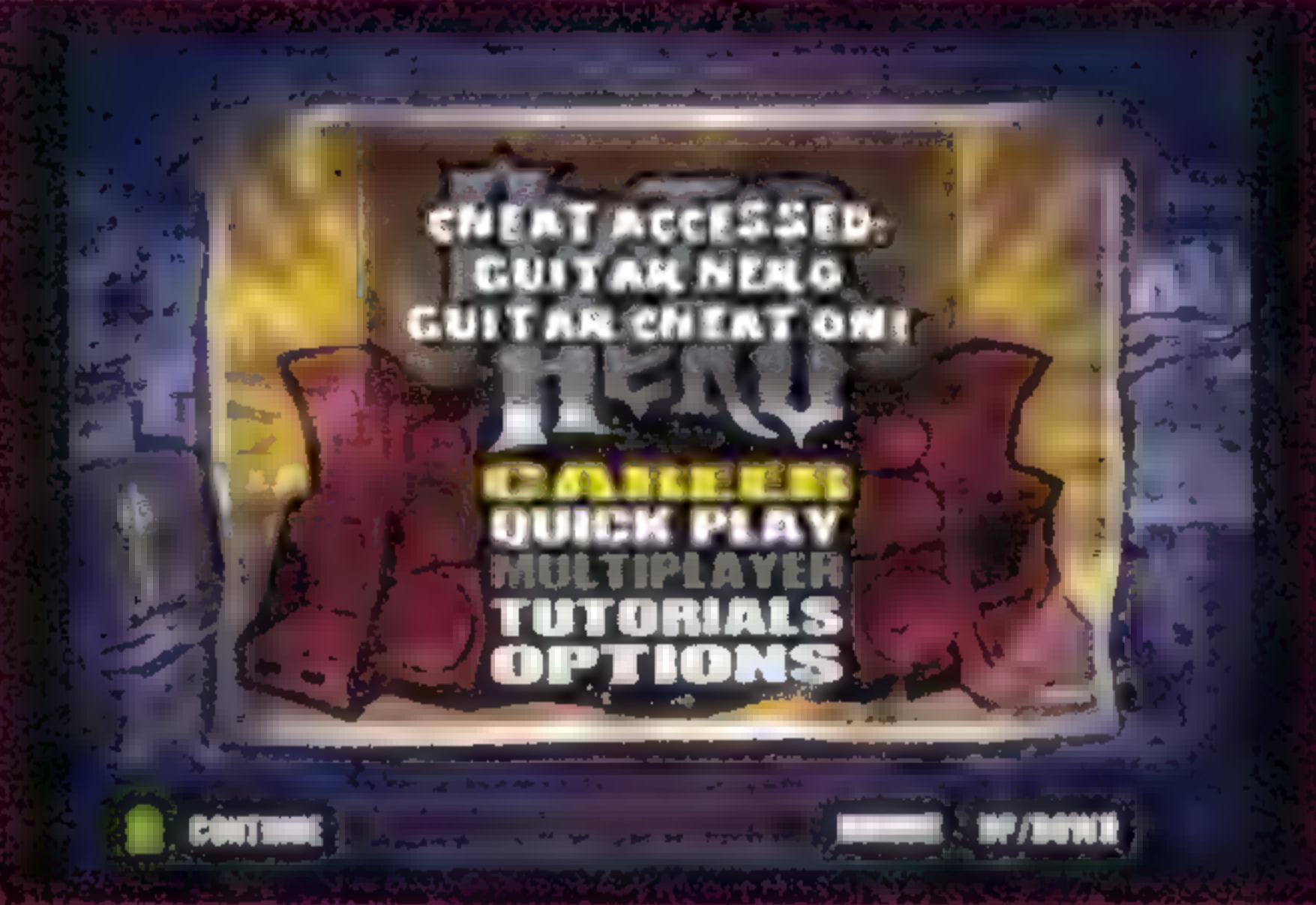
Orange, Orange, Blue, Yellow, Orange

► NO VENUE

Blue, Yellow, Orange, Blue, Yellow, Orange

► CHANGE GUITAR TO GH CONTROLLER

Blue, Orange, Yellow, Blue, Blue



► CROWD HAS MONKEY HEADS

Blue, Orange, Yellow, Yellow, Yellow, Blue, Orange

► ROCK METER ALWAYS STAYS GREEN

Yellow, Blue, Orange, Orange, Blue, Blue, Yellow, Orange

► UNLOCK ALL SONGS

Yellow, Orange, Blue, Blue, Orange, Yellow, Yellow

► CROWD HAS SKULL HEADS
Orange, Yellow, Blue, Blue, Orange, Yellow, Blue, Blue



► Guitar Hero II

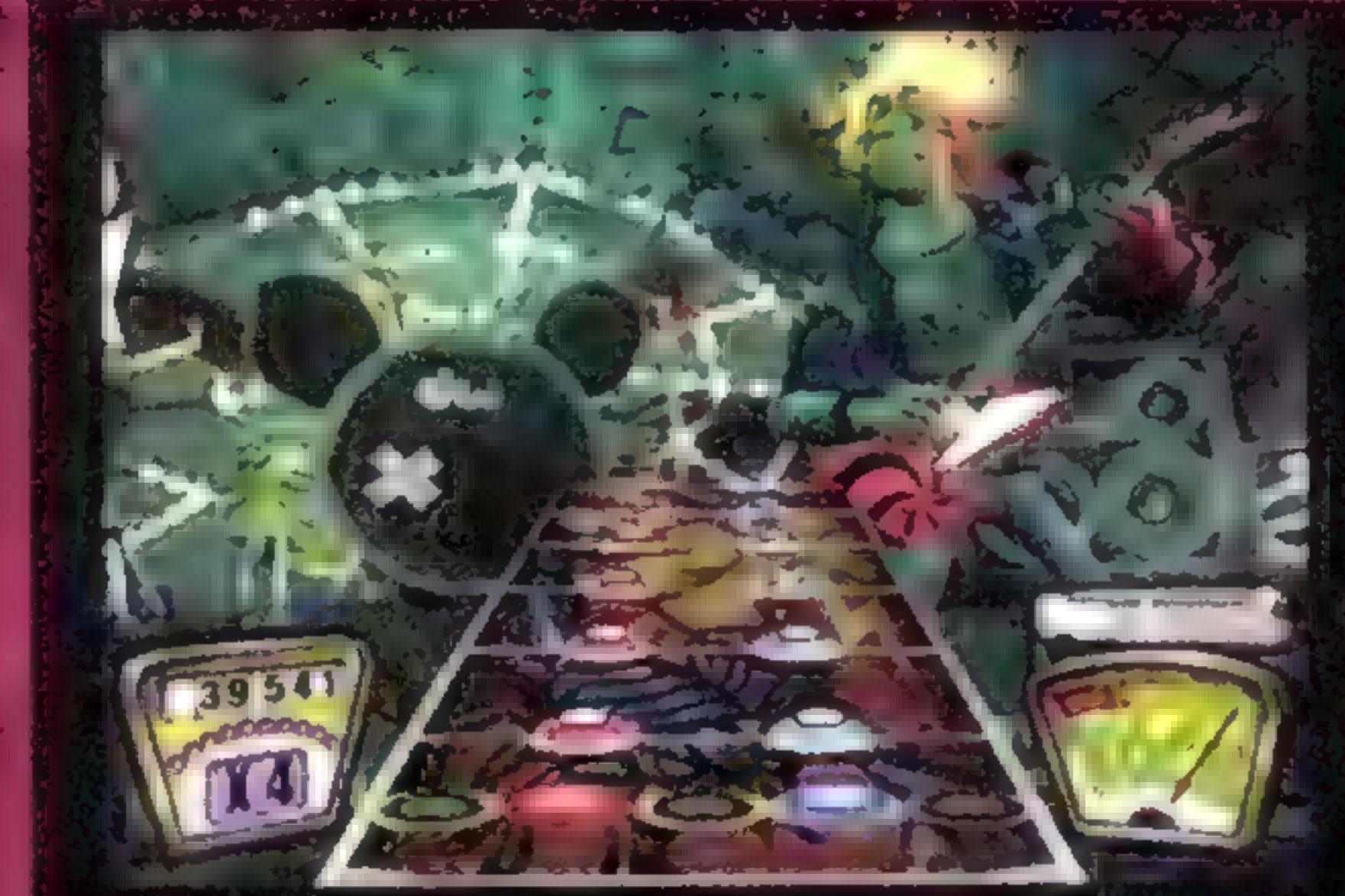
Enter these codes on the guitar controller at the main menu. You don't have to strum – just push the buttons in the right order. If it doesn't work, press them faster. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly. To deactivate the cheat, just enter it a second time.

► AIR GUITAR (GUITAR IS INVISIBLE)

Yellow, Yellow, Blue, Orange, Yellow, Blue

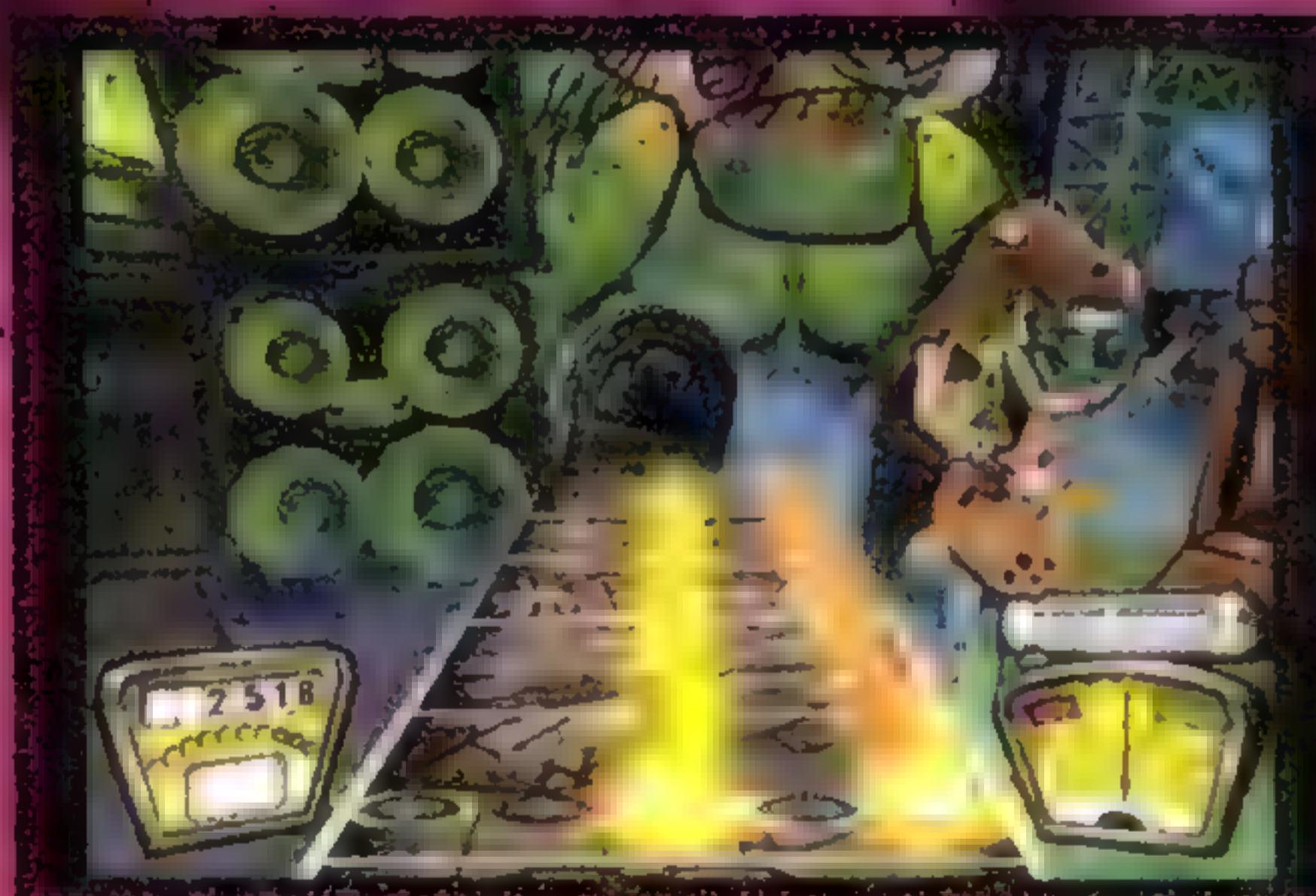
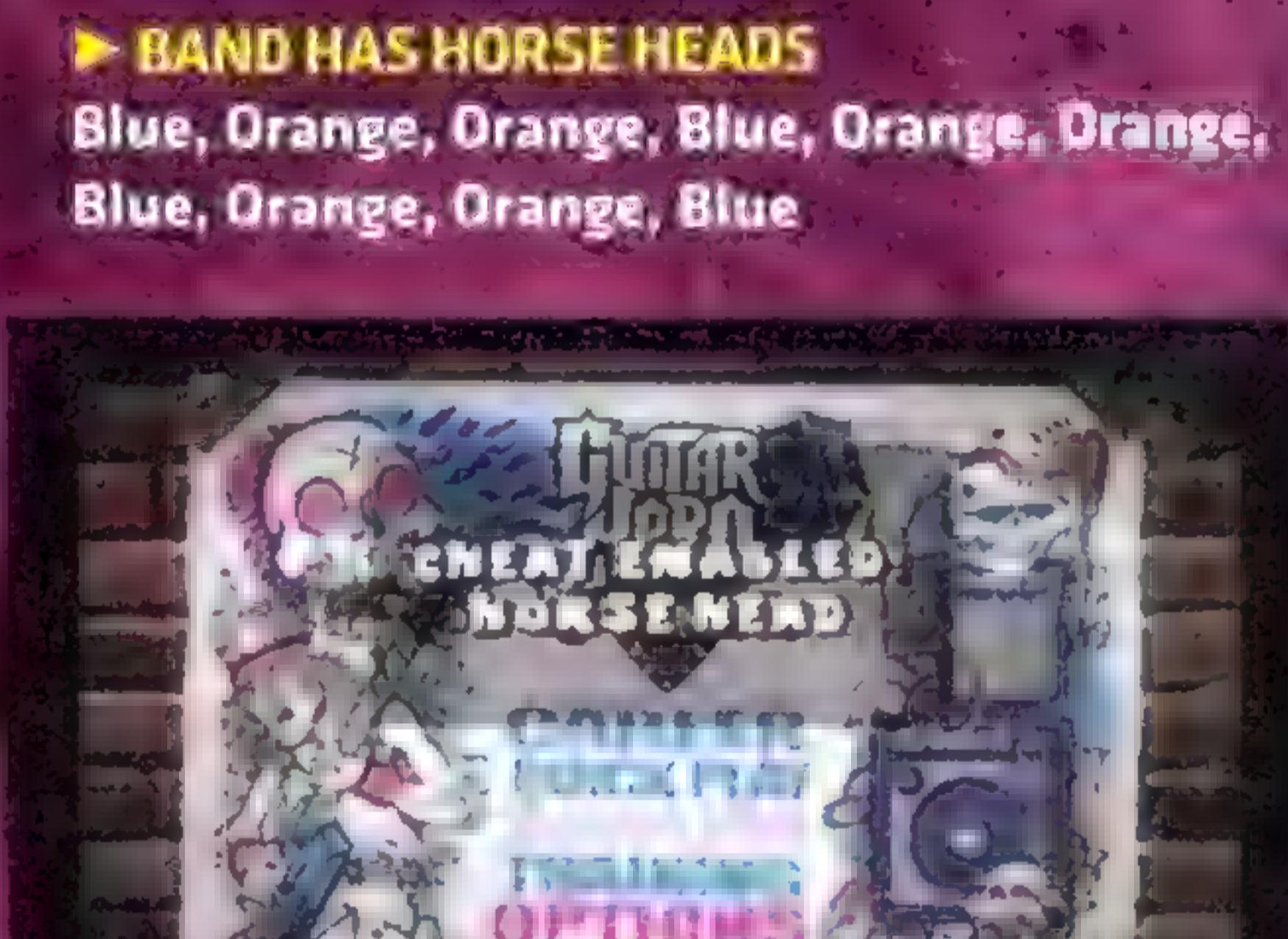
► GUITARIST'S HEAD IS ON FIRE

Orange, Yellow, Orange, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Yellow



► CROWD HAS MONKEY HEADS
Orange, Blue, Yellow, Yellow, Orange, Blue, Yellow, Yellow

► CROWD HAS EYEBALL HEADS
Blue, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Blue



► HYPERSPEED
Orange, Blue, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Blue, Orange, Yellow

► PERFORMANCE MODE (NOTES ARE INVISIBLE)
Yellow, Yellow, Blue, Yellow, Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Yellow

► PRECISION MODE

Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Red + Blue.

► UNLOCK ALL SONGS

Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Red + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue

► Rock Band

Enter this code at the main logo screen. You don't have to strum - just push the buttons in the right order. If it doesn't work, press them faster. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly.

► UNLOCK ALL SONGS

Red, Yellow, Blue, Red, Red, Blue, Blue, Red, Yellow, Blue

Playstation 3

► Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock

Enter these codes on the guitar controller at the Cheats screen within the Options menu. Select Enter Cheat and a graphic of the guitar controller will appear on the screen. You must press the strum bar as you push each button or combination of buttons, as if you're playing notes in the game. There is no time limit, so take your time - entering these codes is more about accuracy.. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly. If there are two or more colors listed, hold both/all listed buttons and strum them as a chord.

► NO FAIL

Green + Red, Blue, Green + Red, Green + Yellow, Blue, Green + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Orange, Red + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Red

► PERFORMANCE MODE (NOTES ARE INVISIBLE)

Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Orange, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Green + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue

► AIR GUITAR (GUITAR IS INVISIBLE)

Blue + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow

► PRECISION MODE (GIVES YOU LESS TIME TO HIT NOTES)

Green + Red, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, YB, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Green + Red, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, YB, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange

► HYPERSPEED

Orange, Blue, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Blue, Orange, Yellow



► EASY EXPERT (GIVES YOU MORE TIME TO HIT NOTES)

Green + Red, Green + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Red + Blue, Blue + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue,

► BRET MICHAELS AS SINGER

Green + Red, Green + Red, Green + Red, Green + Blue, Green + Blue, Green + Blue, Green + Blue, Red + Blue, Red, Red, Red, Red + Blue, Red, Red, Red, Red

► UNLOCK ALL SONGS

Yellow + Orange, Red + Blue, Red + Orange, Green + Blue, Red + Yellow, Yellow + Orange, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Blue, Yellow, Red, Red + Yellow, Red, Yellow, Orange

► UNLOCK EVERYTHING

Green + Red + Blue + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Blue, Green + Red + Yellow + Orange, Green + Yellow + Blue + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Blue, Red + Yellow + Blue + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Blue, Green + Yellow + Blue + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Blue, Green + Red + Yellow + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Blue, Green + Red + Yellow + Orange

► Guitar Hero: Aerosmith

Enter these codes on the guitar controller at the Cheats screen within the Options menu. Select Enter Cheat and a graphic of the guitar controller will appear on the screen. You must press the strum bar as you push each button or combination of buttons, as if you're playing notes in the game. There is no time limit, so take your time - entering these codes is more about accuracy. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly. If there are two or more colors listed, hold both/all listed buttons and strum them as a chord.

► AIR GUITAR (GUITAR IS INVISIBLE)

Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange.



► NO FAIL

Green + Red, Blue, Green + Red, Green + Yellow, Blue, Green + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Orange, Red + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Red

► HYPERSPEED

Yellow + Orange, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange.

► PERFORMANCE MODE

Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Orange, Red + Blue, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Orange, Red + Blue

► PRECISION MODE

Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Red + Blue.

► UNLOCK ALL SONGS

Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue

► Rock Band

Enter this code at the main logo screen. You don't have to strum - just push the buttons in the right order. If it doesn't work, press them faster. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly.

► UNLOCK ALL SONGS

Yellow, Red, Blue, Yellow, Yellow, Blue, Blue, Yellow, Red, Blue

Xbox 360

► Guitar Hero II

Enter these codes on the guitar controller at the main menu. You don't have to strum - just push the buttons in the right order. If it doesn't work, press them faster. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly. To deactivate the cheat, just enter it a second time.

► GUITARIST'S HEAD IS ON FIRE

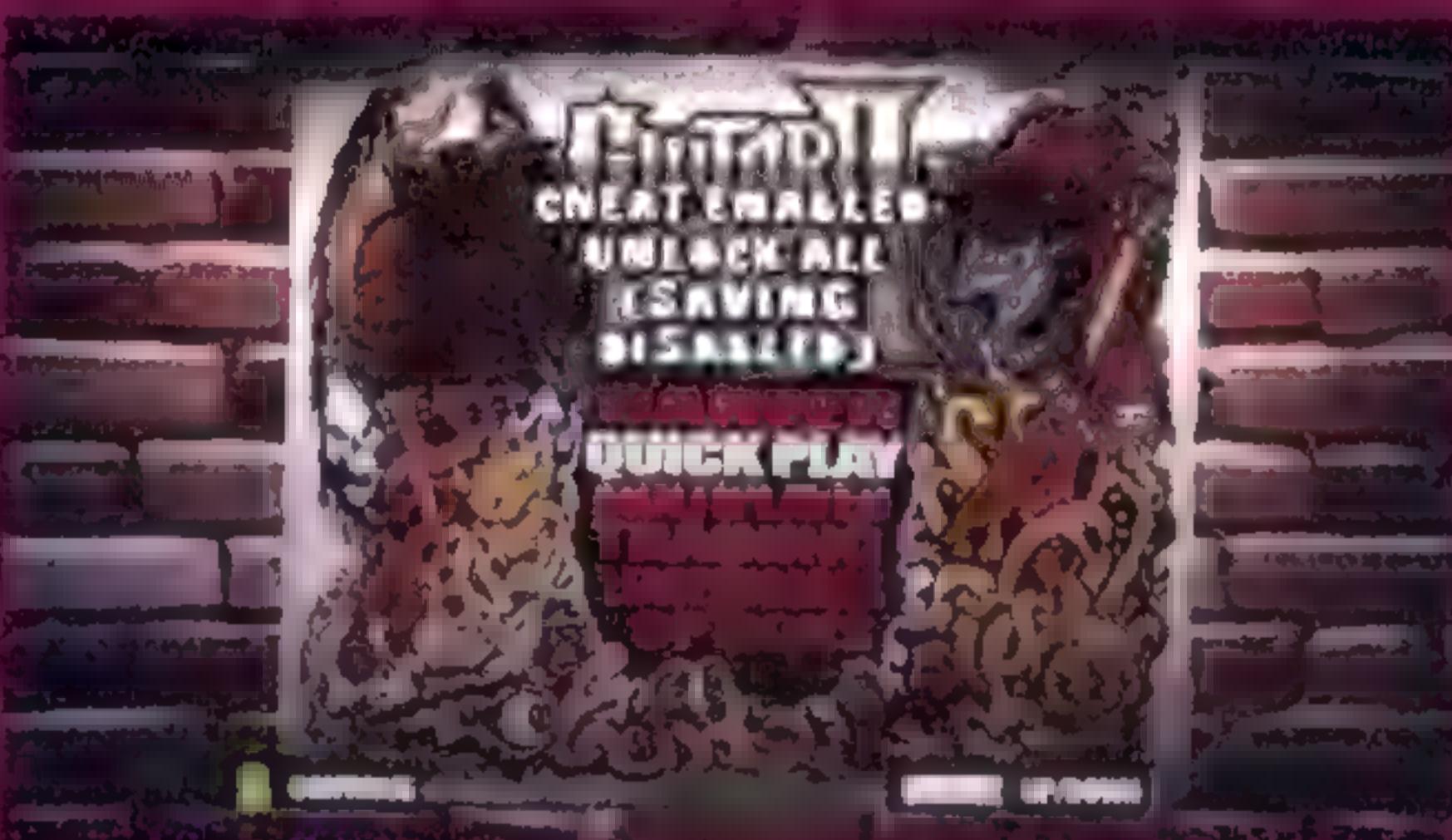
Orange, Yellow, Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Yellow, Yellow, Yellow

► CROWD HAS MONKEY HEADS

Orange, Yellow, Blue, Blue, Yellow, Orange, Blue, Blue

► UNLOCK ALL SONGS

Blue, Yellow, Orange, Red, Yellow, Orange, Blue, Yellow, Blue, Yellow, Blue, Yellow, Blue, Yellow, Blue, Yellow



► CROWD HAS EYEBALL HEADS

Yellow, Orange, Blue, Blue, Blue, Orange, Yellow

► HYPERSPEED

Blue, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Blue, Orange, Yellow, Yellow

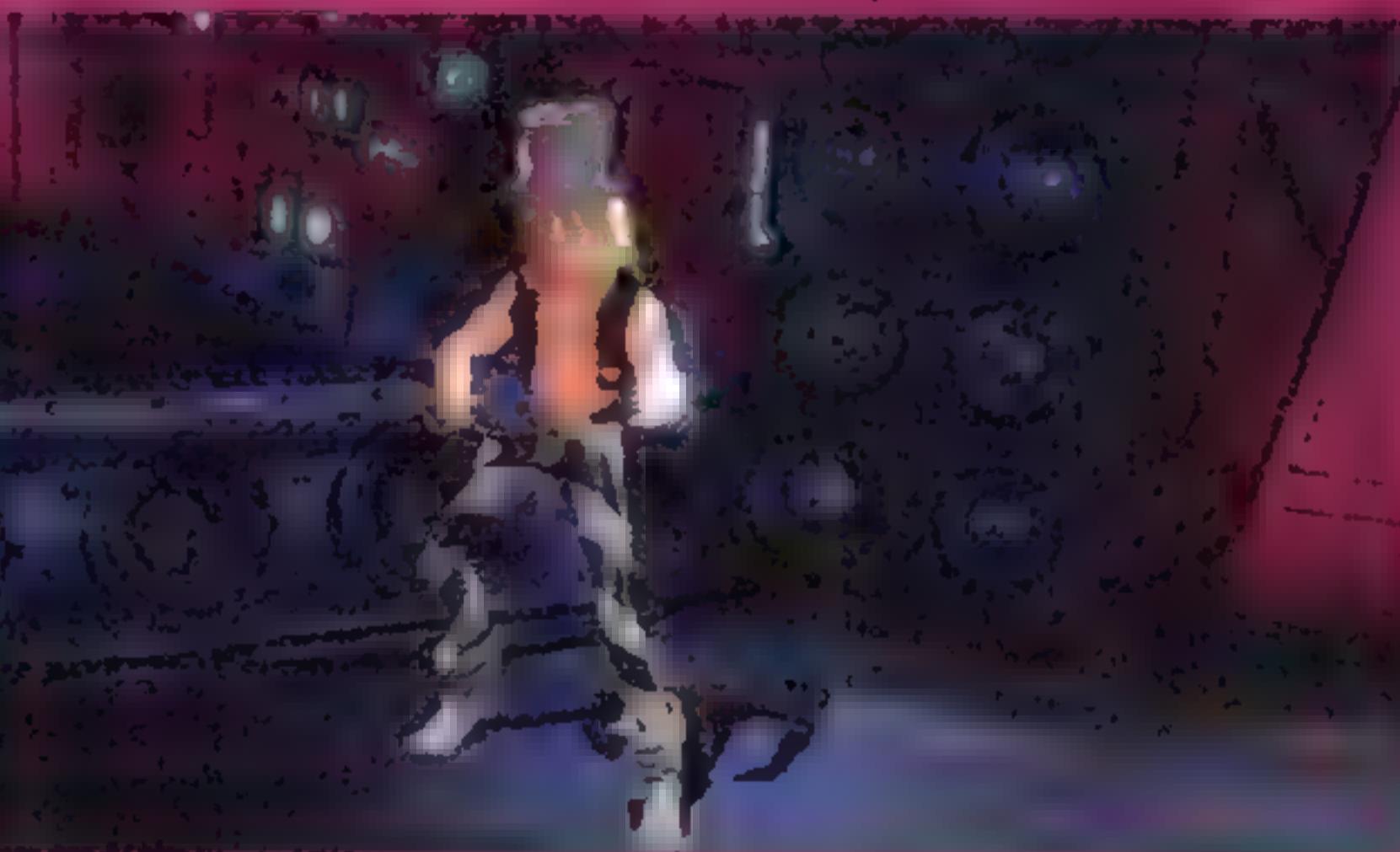
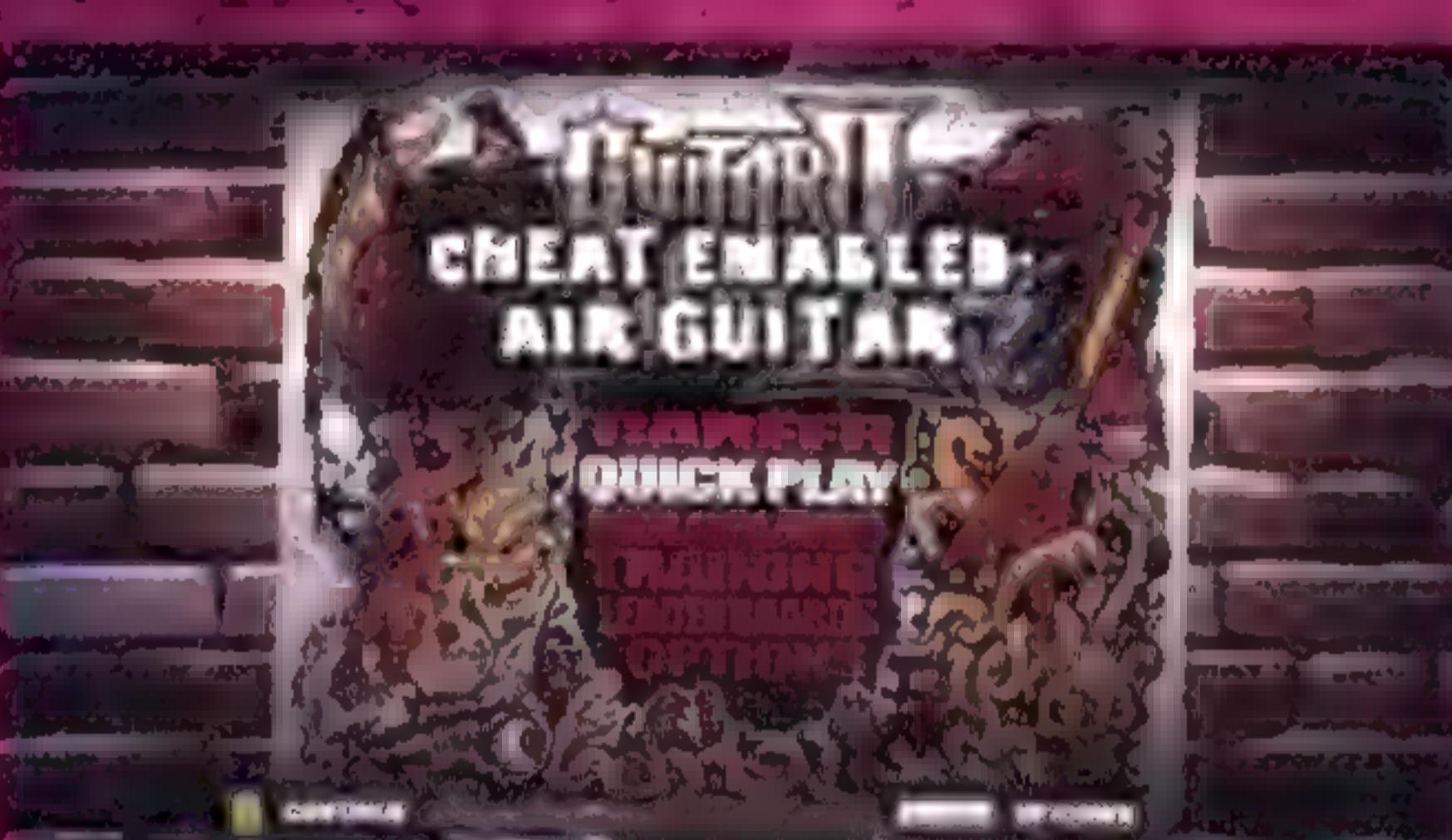
► PERFORMANCE MODE (NOTES ARE INVISIBLE)

Blue, Blue, Yellow, Blue, Blue, Orange, Blue, Blue



► AIR GUITAR (GUITAR IS INVISIBLE)

Yellow, Blue, Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Blue



► Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock

Enter these codes on the guitar controller at the Cheats screen within the Options menu. Select Enter Cheat and a graphic of the guitar controller will appear on the screen. You must press the strum bar as you push each button or combination of buttons, as if you're playing notes in the game. There is no time limit, so take your time - entering these codes is more about accuracy.. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly. If there are two or more colors listed, hold both/all listed buttons and strum them as a chord.

► BRET MICHAELS AS SINGER

Green + Red, Green + Red, Green + Red, Green + Blue, Green + Blue, Green + Blue, Red + Blue, Red, Red, Red, Red + Blue, Red, Red, Red, Red, Red + Blue, Red, Red, Red



► NO FAIL

Green + Red, Blue, Green + Red, Green + Yellow, Blue, Green + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Orange, Red + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Red

► AIR GUITAR (GUITAR IS INVISIBLE)

Blue + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Blue + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow

► HYPERSPEED

Orange, Blue, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Blue, Orange, Yellow

► PERFORMANCE MODE (NOTES ARE INVISIBLE)

Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Orange, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Green + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue

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BREATHE AGAIN
FALLEN

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► **PRECISION MODE (GIVES YOU LESS TIME TO HIT NOTES)**

Green + Red, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, YB, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Green + Red, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, YB, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange

► **UNLOCK ALL SONGS**

Yellow + Orange, Red + Blue, Red + Orange, Green + Blue, Red + Yellow, Yellow + Orange, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow, Red, Red + Yellow, Red, Yellow, Orange

► **UNLOCK EVERYTHING**

Green + Red + Blue + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Blue, Green + Red + Yellow + Orange, Green + Yellow + Blue + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Blue, Red + Yellow + Blue + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Blue, Green + Red + Yellow + Blue, Green + Yellow + Blue + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Orange, Green + Red + Yellow + Orange

► **Guitar Hero: Aerosmith**

Enter these codes on the guitar controller at the Cheats screen within the Options menu. Select Enter Cheat and a graphic of the guitar controller will appear on the screen. You must press the strum bar as you push each button or combination of buttons, as if you're playing notes in the game. There is no time limit, so take your time – entering these codes is more about accuracy. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly. If there are two or more colors listed, hold both/all listed buttons and strum them as a chord.

► **NO FAIL**

Green + Red, Blue, Green + Red, Green + Yellow, Blue, Green + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Orange, Red + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Red

► **HYPERSPEED**

Yellow + Orange, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange

► **PERFORMANCE MODE**

Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Orange, Red + Blue, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Orange, Red + Blue

► **AIR GUITAR (GUITAR IS INVISIBLE)**

Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange



► **PRECISION MODE**

Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Red + Blue

► **UNLOCK ALL SONGS**

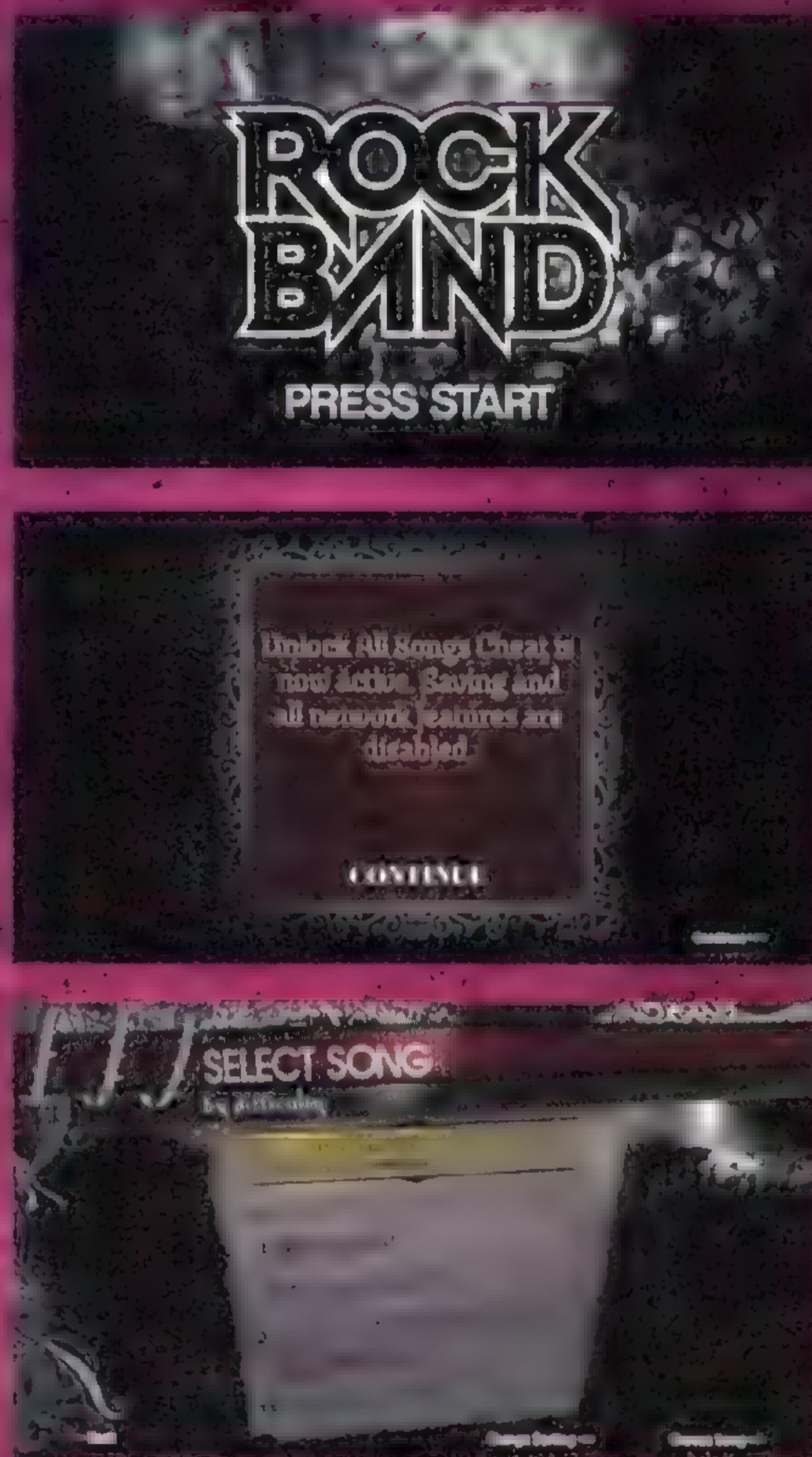
Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue

► **Rock Band**

Enter this code at the main logo screen. You don't have to strum – just push the buttons in the right order. If it doesn't work, press them faster. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly.

► **UNLOCK ALL SONGS**

Red, Yellow, Blue, Red, Red, Blue, Blue, Red, Yellow, Blue



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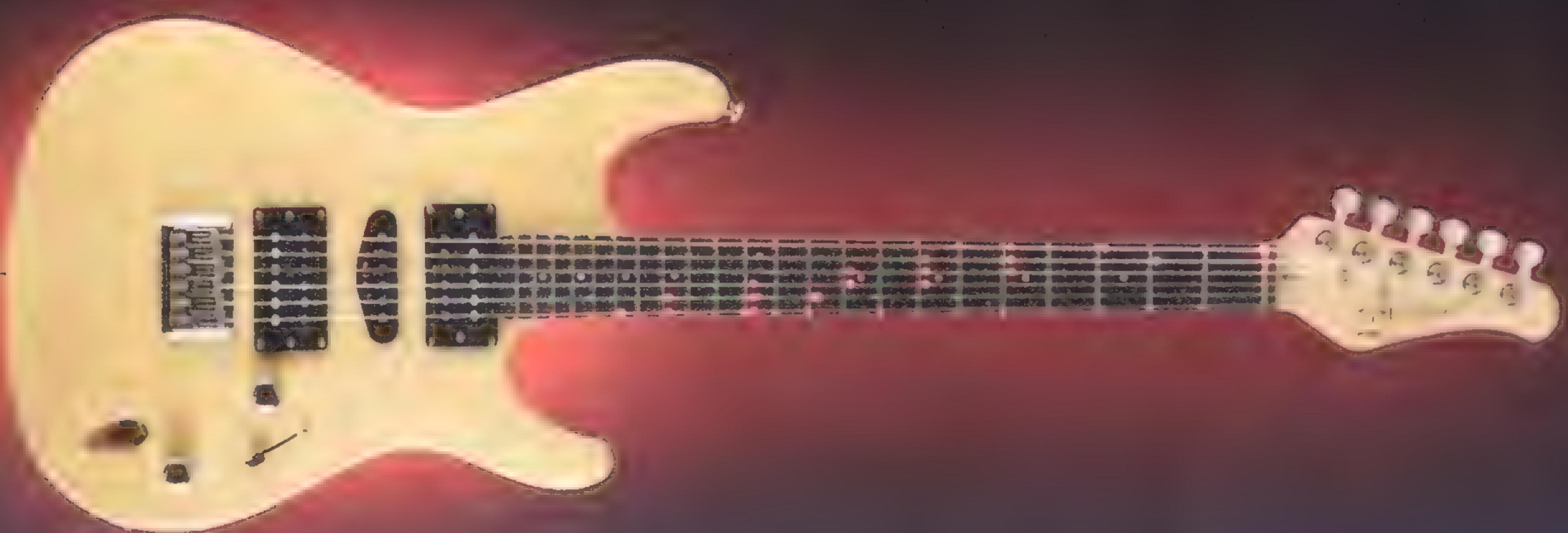
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Nintendo Wii

► Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock

Enter these codes on the guitar controller at the Cheats screen within the Options menu. Select Enter Cheat and a graphic of the guitar controller will appear on the screen. You must press the strum bar as you push each button or combination of buttons, as if you're playing notes in the game. There is no time limit, so take your time - entering these codes is more about accuracy.. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly. If there are two or more colors listed, hold both/all listed buttons and strum them as a chord.

► NO FAIL

Green + Red, Blue, Green + Red, Green + Yellow, Blue, Green + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Orange, Red + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Red

► AIR GUITAR (GUITAR IS INVISIBLE)

Blue + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Blue + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow

► HYPERSPEED

Orange, Blue, Orange, Yellow, Orange, Blue, Orange, Yellow

► PERFORMANCE MODE

Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Orange, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Green + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue

► EASY EXPERT (GIVES YOU MORE TIME TO HIT NOTES)

Green + Red, Green + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Red + Blue, Blue + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue

► PRECISION MODE (GIVES YOU LESS TIME TO HIT NOTES)

Green + Red, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Green + Red, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange

► UNLOCK ALL SONGS

Yellow + Orange, Red + Blue, Red + Orange, Green + Blue, Red + Yellow, Yellow + Orange, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Green + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Red, Red + Yellow, Red, Yellow, Orange

► LARGE GEMS

Green, Red, Green, Yellow, Green, Blue, Green, Orange, Green, Blue, Green, Yellow, Green, Red, Green, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Yellow + Blue, Green + Red, Blue + Orange, Green + Red, Yellow + Blue, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Green + Yellow



time limit, so take your time - entering these codes is more about accuracy. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly. If there are two or more colors listed, hold both/all listed buttons and strum them as a chord.

► NO FAIL

Green + Red, Blue, Green + Red, Green + Yellow, Blue, Green + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Orange, Red + Yellow, Green + Yellow, Yellow, Green + Yellow, Green + Red

► AIR GUITAR (GUITAR IS INVISIBLE)

Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange

► HYPERSPEED

Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Yellow + Orange, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Orange

► PERFORMANCE MODE

Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Orange, Red + Blue, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Orange, Red + Blue

► PRECISION MODE

Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Red + Blue, Yellow + Blue, Yellow + Blue

► UNLOCK ALL SONGS

Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Green + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Yellow, Green + Red, Red + Red, Red + Yellow, Red + Blue

► Rock Band

Enter this code at the main logo screen. You don't have to strum - just push the buttons in the right order. If it doesn't work, press them faster. The game will tell you when you've entered each code correctly.

► UNLOCK ALL SONGS

Red, Yellow, Blue, Red, Red, Blue, Blue, Red, Yellow, Blue

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THE GUITAR HEROES

MEET THE REAL GUITAR HEROES BEHIND THE GAMING CONSOLE. SLASH, JOE PERRY AND THE MUSICIANS WHO SUPPLY THE RIPPING LICKS FOR YOUR FAVORITE GAMES TELL US HOW THEY GOT THE JOB AND HOW THEY GET IT DONE.







LOSE YOUR ILLUSIONS

AS GUITAR HERO ROLLS OUT ITS SPECIAL AEROSMITH EDITION, GUITARIST JOE PERRY TALKS ABOUT THE VIRTUES OF THE VIRTUAL GUITAR GAME AND WHY IT'S NOT THE SAME OLD SONG AND DANCE.

By Richard Bienstock Photo by Ross Halfin

On the day that Joe Perry sits down for this interview, he's preparing to begin a short run of tour dates with TAB the Band, the power trio fronted by his sons Adrian and Tony. The 57-year-old guitarist will be accompanying the group onstage, trading off solos with guitarist Tony and vocals with singer/bassist Adrian in a loose, energetic set comprised of TAB and Aerosmith songs. "It reminds me so much of the way I started out," Perry says of playing alongside his sons. "Just grabbing my guitar and wailing. It's a great feeling."

And it's one Perry is hoping kids will be able to recreate—albeit using five buttons rather than six strings—when playing the new *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith*, the fifth installment of the hugely popular video game series and the first to focus on a single band. *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* tracks the almost 40-year career of the group and features close to 30 of their songs, from hits like "Sweet Emotion," "Rag Doll" and "Love in an Elevator" to deeper cuts like "Uncle Salty," "Make It" and "Movin' Out." In addition, all five members—Perry, singer Steven Tyler, guitarist Brad Whitford, bassist Tom Hamilton and drummer Joey Kramer—underwent extensive motion-capturing sessions to bring their likenesses to animated life. Says Perry, "It's like a video-game version of an historic novel."

Guitar Hero: Aerosmith marks the third time the band has been associated with the franchise. The second *Guitar Hero* featured a cover version of the Rock's cut "Last Child," while *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock* included the original *Get Your Wings* album version of "Same Old Song and Dance." It was the latter song that helped lay the groundwork for this latest venture.

"Initially, we planned on using a [cover] take of 'Same Old Song and Dance' for *Guitar Hero III*," says Alan Flores, the lead designer for the game for developer Neversoft. "But the vocals were pretty bad—they sounded nothing like Steven Tyler's. And really, nobody sounds like Steven Tyler but Steven Tyler. So we contacted Aerosmith's management, and when Joe Perry found out about it, he got the master track of the song to us within a day. He was really excited about it, and that established the relationship. Eventually we were like, 'Let's get together and do something bigger.'

"Since Aerosmith has such a huge body of work, it seemed like a natural fit to create a game based entirely

around the band," says *Guitar Hero* senior producer Chris Parise. "And there's a lot of history crammed into it. We recreated venues the band has performed in over the years. For the song 'No Surprize,' for instance, we have them playing in [former New York City nightclub] Max's Kansas City, which Steven sings about in the lyrics, and even included tracks from other artists they've toured with. There's also some cool behind the scenes stuff and interview segments. If you don't know a lot about Aerosmith, you will after playing. And if you already love the band, then you're gonna love the game."

There's certainly plenty of people who love both. Aerosmith have long been one of the world's biggest rock and roll acts and are arguably as popular today as at any time throughout their career. *Guitar Hero*, meanwhile, has become a pop-culture phenomenon. The franchise has moved more than 15 million units of its four titles since its debut in 2005, racking up more than a billion dollars in sales in the process. And as much as Aerosmith have managed to attract the ears of each successive generation of listeners, *Guitar Hero* is widely credited with not only exposing young fans

to both old and new rock acts but also sparking sales for these artist's catalogs. "It's amazing how the game has increased the demand for this kind of music again," Perry says.

Perhaps not only the demand for listening to the music but also for playing it—for real. "One of the great things about *Guitar Hero*," Perry says, "is that it's about as close as you can get to playing the guitar without having to learn how. But the thing is, I think there will be a fair amount of kids who are gonna play the game and then say, 'Wow, I wonder what

it feels like to actually make that sound.' And then they'll do it."

GUITAR WORLD How were you first introduced to *Guitar Hero*?

JOE PERRY I saw my kids playing the first one when it came out a few years ago. I fooled around with it a little bit and got past the basic level, but after that I was lost. I guess that's when being a gamer really comes into play. It isn't as intuitive as you would think. But the kids got it fast, and I think it has a lot more going for it than all that





first-person-shooter stuff. You can only do so much of that, you know? Bottom line, how many car crash-ups can you see? How much blood do you want splattered across the screen? It's just a whole different way to play video games without all this violence or, you know, Mario. [laughs] And you get to listen to rock and roll, so that's great.

GW And now Aerosmith have their own edition.

PERRY Even back when I played the game for the first time I thought, This is a really good opportunity to get our music out there. There's so much rock and roll in video games these days, but this is the first one that's really made the music interactive with the game itself. It's basically like the next step of air guitar. So after the whole thing with "Same Old Song and Dance," we started talking with the producers and got the ball rolling. And they were really excited that we were so interested in it.

GW *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* spans almost your entire career. The first level takes place at Nipmuc High School, the site of the band's debut performance in 1970.

PERRY It picks up different cues

from different parts of our history: some of the places we've played, some of the musical high points. That's how we worked out the levels. There's Nipmuc, and then there's also the Super Bowl, which we played in 2001. Other bands that we've toured with over the years make appearances, too. The New York Dolls are in there, Mott the Hoople, Cheap Trick... The whole thing just worked really well with the format of the game.

GW How did you go about choosing the songs?

PERRY Basically, the music led the way. We went for songs that had a lot of guitar on them. For instance, we put "Combination" [from 1975's *Rocks*] on there. There are also a couple songs from my solo albums that are really guitar heavy. We all picked songs from the point of view of how much they rock. It wasn't like, "We gotta put this single on there, or that song because it's the most popular." Playing this game is like listening to a classic rock station on the radio.

GW Which is great, since there are fewer mainstream outlets for the music these days.

PERRY The record labels, and the

music business in general, aren't what they used to be. There's still a lot of great rock and roll out there, but how do you find out about it? You spend a few hours browsing the Internet, you talk with your friends, you seek it out. But there's no system the way there used to be, with bands releasing an album and following with a tour where you're really supported by the record company, and doing it again and again, just slowly working your way up. It's changed so much that I think this is going to be an important part of the music busi-

of filter to find out about the music. *Guitar Hero* has really brought a lot of this type of music back to the surface. Kids are hearing the old songs and some new songs, and they're not really concerned about when they came out or if the bands playing them are cool or not. All they care about is if they like the song—or how hard it is to play. [laughs]

GW Maybe the game will jump-start a new generation of guitar heroes. Do you think that type of player still exists?

PERRY I never really got what a



ness. We were just talking the other day about how we'll be able to put songs up on the *Guitar Hero* web site that people can download. I read last week about a band that's releasing their new single on a video game. It's really a great medium to get new music out there.

GW The game functions as a filter.

PERRY Exactly. Even with all these new revenue streams like digital downloads, you still need some kind

guitar hero is anyway. We're not out there saving lives, you know? We just play our instruments. What's the hero part of it?

GW The idea of the musician as a larger-than-life personality. A guy like Jimmy Page, for instance.

PERRY Well, I still wouldn't use the word "hero." If you look it up in the dictionary, I don't think any of us fit the bill. But Jimmy Page, he's certainly a magical guy, to say the least. ☀

FILM BY ALEX G.
SID & NANCY



LOSE YOUR ILLUSIONS

VELVET REVOLVER'S SLASH WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A VIRTUAL HERO FOR GUITAR WANNABES IN GUITAR HERO III. BUT HE FINDS THAT WINNING THE GAME—LIKE BECOMING A REAL GUITAR HERO—TAKES MORE THAN A LITTLE PATIENCE.

» *By Richard Bienstock* » *Photo by Travis Shinn*

The Games

The Gear

THE GUITARISTS

69



Being a guitar hero means occasionally finding yourself in bizarre situations. Just ask Slash, who this past January was seen strolling onstage in the middle of Microsoft chairman Bill Gates's keynote address at the 2008 Consumer Electronics Show. Clad in his trademark top hat and a tattered flannel shirt, the Velvet Revolver guitarist was brought out as a ringer for the buttoned-up tech titan during a game of—what else?—*Guitar Hero*.

This odd coupling resulted from another unusual moment for Slash: his transformation last year into an animated character for *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock*. Players that successfully battle through a succession of songs that range from Foghat's "Slow Ride" to Rage Against the Machine's "Bulls on Parade" (featuring a similarly animated Tom Morello) to AFI's "Miss Murder" are awarded the chance to throw down against the guitarist. A win not only "unlocks" the former Guns N' Roses axeman as a playable character—it also means you're better at *Guitar Hero* than the flesh-and-bone Slash. "I haven't been able to get that far," he admits. "Though I don't know if I'd want to, anyway. I don't think I could handle playing myself."

Despite his shortcomings as a gamer, Slash is, like seemingly everyone these days, a *Guitar Hero* obsessive. Which is one of the reasons he signed on to *GHIII*. In addition to appearing as an animated character, Slash penned the theme song, and Guns N' Roses' "Welcome to the Jungle" is featured on the soundtrack (a cover version of

"Sweet Child O' Mine" was included in 2006's *Guitar Hero II*). "It's such a cool thing, this brand-new, shiny concept," he says. "It was a huge honor to be a part of the game."

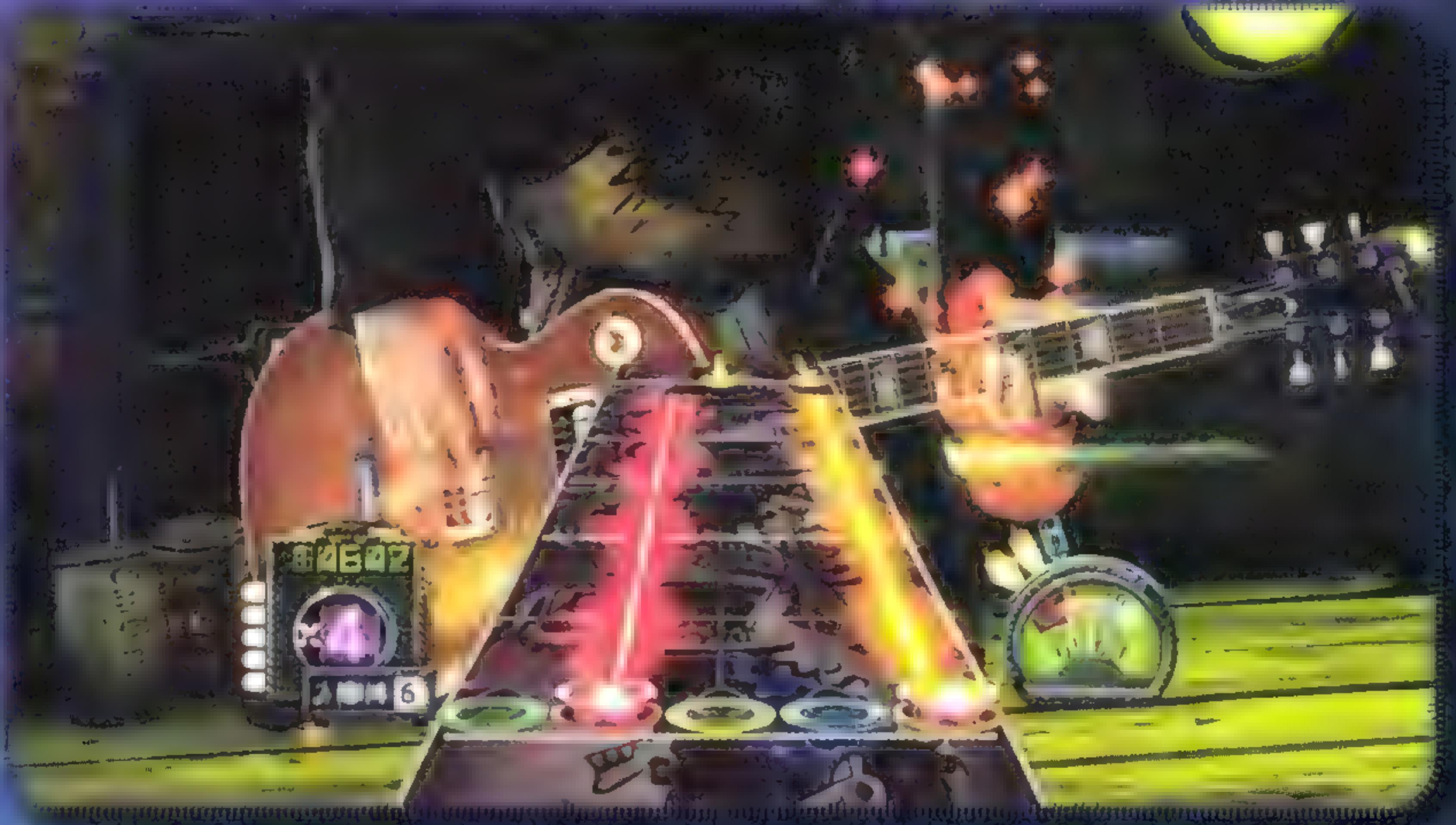
And, likewise to play the finished product alongside Bill Gates. "I have to admit that I had a lot of trepidation about that at first," Slash says. "I mean, I don't know what a keynote speech is, nor do I hang out in those types of corporate circles. But it was cool, and it was nice to meet Bill, who is someone I have a lot of respect for."

"Plus," he adds, "I'm a pretty easygoing guy. I'll do all kinds of stupid shit."

GUITAR WORLD Word on the street is that you're actually pretty good at *Guitar Hero*.

SLASH I'm not really what you'd call a "game head," but I just kind of took to it. I have this office

space near the back of my house where I hooked up *Guitar Hero II*. Next thing I knew I was swallowed up by it. I mean, I didn't answer the phone, didn't take care of anything around the house—I didn't even play my real guitars. For a solid week or two, I was all about beating the game. And I did beat it—but only on "Medium." Once you go into "Hard" and "Expert" modes, you're off in another world.



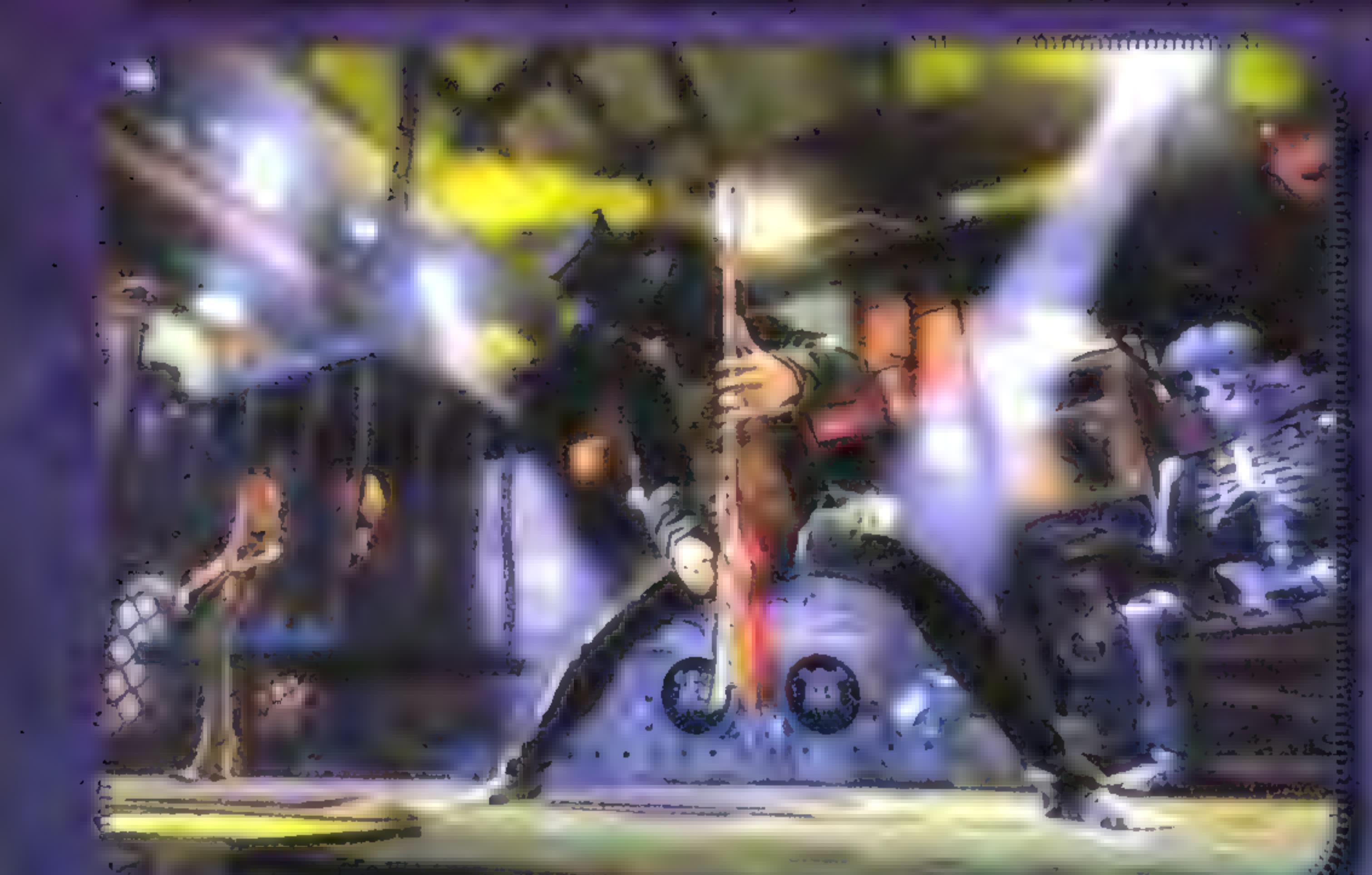
I started messing around in those levels and actually got through the first couple songs. But I realized at the rate I was going I was never going to make it to band practice with Velvet Revolver. So I unplugged the game, put it back in the box and hid it away. It was sort of like booze or drugs: I had to get it out of my sight. [laughs] And a few weeks after I weaned myself off it, I got a call from my manager, who said that Activision wanted to know if I'd be interested not just in being involved in the next one but actually being in it.

GW What was the motion-capture process like to create your character for *Guitar Hero III*?

SLASH That was six or seven hours outside of my comfort zone. I had to wear a mo-cap [motion capturing] suit loaded with all these camera receivers, and stand in this big rectangular space with cameras all around me. You basically have to "rock out" within the rectangle. Which was weird, because it's hard for me to pretend to do what I do—I just do it. You gotta get into all these different positions, and I remember getting pissed off and kinda frustrated at the beginning, basically turning into an asshole. But halfway through, it started to become fun. And then there was the image scanning, which was just a matter of having to sit still so they could shoot me from a bunch of different angles. But it was all worth it in the end.

GW And yet you haven't gotten far enough in the game to actually use your animated counterpart?

SLASH To be honest, after I went cold turkey with the second version, I didn't touch the game for a while. And then when Activision sent me *III*, I remember my security guard was at my house and I was all like, "Check this out." I plugged it in and went into the first song and couldn't play it at all. It was pretty embarrassing.



and roll that's programmed into the game that they would never otherwise hear.

CW There's not too many places a 10-year-old is going to hear Foghat nowadays.

SLASH Exactly. So that's cool. A lot of people have been asking, "Is this the new wave of how people are going to be exposed to music?" I thought that was sort of like a joke question when I first heard it, but I'm starting to realize that, given the current state of the music business, it might be. Because the kids are into it, and the possibilities are endless in terms of what you can expose them to through this medium.

CW Would you consider using a video game as a platform to release new music in the future?

SLASH Well, I have plans to do a solo record—I'm working on it a little bit now—and the added possibility of doing something in line with *Guitar Hero* is definitely there. I did a song already, but that was just a theme. I don't think I would do something like that again, but it seems to me that it would be cool as another outlet for the music.

CW That sort of synergy at one time would have been considered selling out.

SLASH When I got involved with *Guitar Hero* I did ask myself that question—whether it was crossing the line between art and commercialism. But I thought the idea was so cool that I just took the risk. I wanted to be involved in it. And I realized there was no reason to be concerned about selling out. The main thing that people want to do when they create music is to expose other people to it. *Guitar Hero* is a great way to get your music out there, and it's also a cool game, you know? What's better than kids picking up a guitar—real or fake—and learning your songs?

CW So what *Guitar Hero* song are you best at playing?

SLASH To be honest, I couldn't say. I'm pretty good at "Free Bird." That's the last one I remember doing. But really, whatever song it is doesn't matter that much. For me it's about just getting from one end to the other and moving on to the next tune. That's what you get addicted to.

CW How are you at, say, "Sweet Child O' Mine"?

SLASH That was actually one of the easier songs in *Guitar Hero II*. It got hard for me when I got into Primus, Megadeth, that kind of stuff. But "Sweet Child" came pretty easily. I don't think you're gonna surprise me with that one at this point.



The Real HEROES

EVERY KILLER TRACK IN GUITAR HERO
& ROCK BAND STARTS WITH AN EquALLY
KILLER RECORDING.

MEET THE PLAYERS AND
PRODUCERS WHO MAKE
THE MUSIC BEHIND THE MAGIC.

» *By Dan Amrich*

WaveGroup, from left to right: Nick Gallant, Mark Lee, Bryan Gordon, Will Littlejohn, Clay Bairlow, Sue Kim Nieva, David Urrutia, Bob Marshall, Lindsay Bauer, Leslie Barton, and Scott Dugdale.



Let's do 'Mississippi Queen!'" calls Dave Urrutia as the staff of WaveGroup Studios gathers around a projection screen in Studio A and gets ready for a round of *Rock Band*. "Oh sure," teases Kim Nieva. "You wanna sing the song you recorded." Dave just grins and leans into his microphone stand, doing his best physical approximation of Steven Tyler, as the opening cowbell beats of the Mountain classic kick the band into high gear. But before long, the singer fails and needs to be saved by his bandmates. After a wave of boos from the crowd, he replies, "Hey, I recorded it – I didn't sing it!"

Credit where it's due, then: Harmonix programmed it. MTV and EA got it into stores – but who really made the music for the original tracks on *Rock Band*? Someone had to hire studio musicians, create stunningly accurate re-recordings of classic songs, and mix them to perfection. And that somebody, from the beginning of the *Guitar Hero* saga to the present day, has been WaveGroup.

You wouldn't think that a Saturday morning cartoon was the genesis of the epic recording of "Green Grass & High Tides" in *Rock Band*, but when has rock and roll ever been predictable? "We started as a traditional post-production recording studio, somewhere in the mid-90s," recalls WaveGroup president Will Littlejohn. "We worked on an ABC stop-motion animated series called *Bump in the Night*. James Allen was a Skywalker Sound mixer and he was friends with the director of *Bump*, so he got the gig to do post for the series. James formed WaveGroup...which was him." As the series

ramped up, Allen moved WaveGroup from his house to an 80,000-square-foot building in nearby Brisbane, California, which served as the headquarters for the entire production. "All of the sets—the storyboarding, all the model making, all the manufacturing, the tooling of the puppets—all of it was done in one building." Littlejohn was a mere intern at the time. "I worked my butt off," he says. "I just learned everything there was to learn about post. It was the best education I could get, and I loved it – I was 24/7 at the studio."

By the time *Bump in the Night* was unceremoniously cancelled, Littlejohn was a full-fledged editor, and he convinced Allen to carry on the WaveGroup banner together. "We made a deal to buy all the equipment from ABC, then we set up shop in Santa Clara and started working in games. I think the very first game we worked on was *Clayfighter 63 1/3*.

We probably weren't very good, but we did it." (In a neat bit of foreshadowing, one of WaveGroup's early gigs was to help create the whooshing sound that accompanies the Activision logo that appears before every game – including *Guitar Hero II*.)

WaveGroup opened multiple studios around the Bay Area over the next several years, finally settling in the current Fremont location in 2001 – directly across the street from the building that once housed MC Hammer's dance studio. Within a few years, the company had begun working with Konami on its early music games, including the DJ simulation *Bentonia* and the wildly popular *Dance Dance Revolution*. "We also did some sports games that weren't that successful," says Littlejohn.



The Real Heroes

"We've got some drama where we had to do four months of work in two weeks. That kind of thing. We kinda salvaged a couple projects for them. Pulling through in the clutch led to an offer to work on a new game series called *Karaoke Revolution*. "We got that gig and we went whole hog," says Littlejohn. "This is going to be the best music anyone's recorded for karaoke ever! We just went crazy and started taking the production value really high. And we started working with Harmonix – we established some really great relationships with all those guys, especially Alex Rigopulos and Tracy Rosenthal Newsom."

And then, along came *Guitar Hero*. RedOctane – ironically, 15 miles away from us, in Sunnyvale – contacts Harmonix in Boston asking if they want to do this guitar game. And then Alex called me and I said, 'That sounds really cool – let's go for it.' But while RedOctane and Harmonix got the lion's share of the credit, Littlejohn describes WaveGroup as "kinda the silent third cog in the whole *Guitar Hero* thing. We weren't out there to get a bunch of press or anything; our job was to make sure we made the best music we could to make sure the game was successful."

Ensuring that success required some superhuman effort. After hiring local session aces and long-time friends to play the guitar parts, Littlejohn holed up in a small editing room and mixed the entire output of the first *Guitar Hero* game himself. He was not only battling intense deadlines but also working with Harmonix to try to figure out just how the hell this was all going to, you know, work. "I remember being on the phone with Eric Brosius, the audio director for Harmonix," he says. "We had done the karaoke stuff, so we had worked out how to technically deliver the tracks a few years earlier – we knew we were going to do the same type of thing with the guitar. But we needed to figure out how we were going to do this, and in the very first game, I had the honor of picking the road map of what you're going to play. I spent a lot of time figuring it out, especially in songs where you are crossing over parts and lots of things are happening." Littlejohn also suggested that when a player missed a note, the soundtrack should drop out completely. "I was adamant," he says. "That's the payoff, and it's the only way that it's going to work. That's one of my proudest moments, and a proud contribution to the whole... genre, really."

As the series expanded, so did WaveGroup's involvement. "We finished *Guitar Hero II* and then *Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the 80s* hit," remembers Littlejohn. "It was on an incredibly tight schedule and we were faced with the decision: Do we do this or not? Because we only had six or seven weeks to do all the songs. Being an absolute lunatic, I said 'Yeah, okay. We'll do it, we'll save the day. We're WaveGroup, we can leap tall buildings... or whatever.'" As a result, the studio has recorded and mixed material for *Guitar Hero I* through *III*, plus



CHE, *GH*, *Aerosmith*, and *Rock Band*. That's no small feat, considering that Neversoft took over the development of the *Guitar Hero* series and still turned to WaveGroup instead of any one of hundreds of studios local to them in and around Los Angeles. "I would assume that everyone thought we were doing good work," says Littlejohn with a humble shrug. "If something is working, why change it? I don't know the thought process on either end, but I know that when you are investing tons of money into something, variables are not a good thing. If you can eliminate a variable, then that's what you want to do."

Working for two rivals means keeping your mouth shut. WaveGroup creates tracks under strict non-disclosure agreements, so they can't tell the *Guitar Hero* folks what *Rock Band* is up to or vice versa... even when they've chosen the same song. "We had to do two different versions of Iron Maiden's 'Wrathchild,'" says Littlejohn, noting that it's the only time to date the two franchises have requested the same track. "What was funny was explaining it to the guitarist, Doug Doppler," says Nick Gallant, a Berklee grad who joined the WaveGroup team just as the original *Guitar Hero* was crunching toward completion. "Now you gotta do another one! 'What? I just did it!'"

The team at WaveGroup is small – closer to one dozen employees than two – but they're extremely focused and multi-talented. Sue Pelmulder not only serves as a sound engineer, but a civil one as well; she designed a custom convertible console for the facility's main mixing suite, which can be reassembled in multiple configurations. (She's also a lawyer and serves as the company's legal counsel.) Many employees are musicians, so they sometimes work on both sides of the studio, playing or singing on the *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* tracks they wind up mixing for use in the game. (Those crowds you hear singing along with your per-

formance in *Rock Band*? That's pure WaveGroup, too.) Littlejohn himself tackled bass on "Message in a Bottle" for *Guitar Hero*, but admits, "There are all these better players than me, so why should I do that? I played on one or two songs just to do it, but I'll do what I do best and manage the whole mess. And try to bring it in under budget, which is an art."

"One of the most challenging things as a studio musician is when you are doing a song that was done really off-the-cuff by a bunch of guys who are mediocre musicians – like a punk song," says Gallant. "They're just thrashing away, and the real danger with very good studio musicians is that you make a remake that is perfect. When you first heard the Sex Pistols, you felt this visceral rock – so capturing that feeling is the real challenge for the musicians."

Another frequent challenge: Improving on a classic while retaining its spirit. "Something that people don't realize is that we will add stuff – we will add solos," says Gallant. "Lance Taber has been absolutely brilliant



Edit Room B is Scott Dugdale's domain; he relocated from Hawaii to join the WaveGroup team in California.



in some of the stuff he has come up with," adds Littlejohn. "In *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith*, on "All the Young Dudes" – that whole solo section doesn't exist. I called him up and said we're going to give you a lot of time, but you basically have to compose this thing in a way that is really interesting and captures the spirit of the song. It's a Bowie tune, so think about it that way and think about the era. He's an expert on era, and he can really channel that feeling. What's funny is that we decided to change it up even more and made this big poppy ending that doesn't exist – it's out of control and really fun. So it's our own version of the song, but it still has that same feeling; we've captured what we were looking for. Most people will just go, 'oh that's cool,' and they won't really realize what's been done."

Despite all the music created in the building – and the fact that nearly 100 of the studio's *Guitar Hero* recordings are available for purchase in their own right on iTunes – WaveGroup doesn't cater to what used to be the lifeblood of a recording studio: bands. "We never have and we never will," says Gallant. "Economically, it's not a viable business,

and it hasn't been for about 10 years." Instead, the studio handles a lot of telephony – recordings of directory assistance and movie showtimes. Not as sexy as shredding Megadeth and White Zombie covers, maybe, but no less vital.

And as the games move toward setlists of original tracks by the original artists – both *Guitar Hero World Tour* and *Rock Band 2* promise nothing but master recordings upon their release this fall – WaveGroup will understandably have less involvement with both series. It's something that doesn't frighten Littlejohn. "The games business is a dynamic thing," he says. "The fact that this is transitioning into master tracks and artists re-recording their own stuff is fine with me. It's just a natural course – we didn't expect that we were going to be doing *Guitar Hero 5* and 7,000 tracks. I think the fact that we were able to help facilitate the acceptance of this way of consuming music is one of the biggest accomplishments that we have been able to do. We were there from the beginning of *Guitar Hero*, and we are proud of that. But there are new types of audio content that we weren't doing a year ago. So who knows?" ☀

GAMEBOYS

There's a lot of us in the game industry – and they are the ones that are most competitive with one another. So, what's the best game you've ever played? We asked the members of our editorial team to name their favorite video game.

LANCE TABER: "I'm not a gamer, so my skills are amoebic at best. The few times I've tried to play *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, I found myself hilariously unable to do so, much to the amusement of all of my friends. I was just trying to figure out the colored button controllers in relation to the video screen and it all seemed wrong to me. But it was still fun."

MARCUS HENDERSON: "I'm so hot and cold on this game. Funny thing about gamers – we're competitive as hell. My buddy Chris Spicuzza from the band Chimaira is better than me and takes a sick pleasure in kicking my ass in *Guitar Hero*, but he can't hang when it comes to *Dig Dug* online. I'm the *Dig Dug* champ, Chris!"

DOUG DOPPLER: "Honestly, I'm terrible. Although the game does an amazing job of simulating the feeling of actually playing, when I look at the controller and think about all the stuff I need to be practicing, I pick up my guitar."

STEVE OUIMETTE: "I'll be honest, my gaming skills could be a lot better. I can't beat my own songs on Expert, but I'm working on it. For the most part though I've been so busy working on the music side that it just hasn't allowed a lot of time for game practice. So far I've been afraid of going online and getting my ass kicked by the hardcore gamers on my own songs!"

DARRYL ANDERS: "I tried to play along to my own tracks, but it is completely different to use the game's controller, and I didn't do so well..."

NICK GALLANT: "I can't really play most songs on Hard, but on Medium I'm not bad. I am quite happy just sticking to Medium and rocking out – it gives me more room to do cool dance moves while playing. I do enjoy playing the drums on *Rock Band*.

The last game I was really into was *Rygar*. What is really funny is that I just looked up *Rygar* to make sure I was spelling it correctly, and the third thing that came up was a YouTube clip called "Worst Video Games Ever – Rygar." Whatever – it was amazing, a true quest. I'm surprised Bruce Dickinson didn't write a song about it." ☀



The Real Heroes



Marcus Henderson

TAKE STORYBOOK princess Cindarella, ditch the dress, swap out the blonde hair for shaggy brunette locks, and replace the glass slippers with pure metal, and you've got Marcus Henderson. In just three years, he's gone from gifted Bay Area shredder to, well, *Guitar Hero*'s Marcus Henderson. "Initially it began with a few common friends and a series of long-winded jams," he says. "It just kinda happened by being friendly and musical." A combination of networking, discipline, and good karma eventually brought him to the attention of WaveGroup, where he has played on several dozen *GH* tracks – particularly the more technically demanding metal meltdowns – and even sang vocals on the *GH1* version of "I Wanna Be Sedated."

At the start of each assignment, Henderson scrutinized live performance videos of the original artists to reverse engineer the equipment most likely used on the tracks; once he figured out the correct settings, he tracked down the authentic gear to match. "After a few days of non-stop practice, I'll really zone in on the solos or special parts that give the tune its signature sound," he says. "I'll create a little note sheet that reminds me of sections, or even follow full parts tabbed out. After that, it's all

about confidence. You gotta psyche yourself and get ready to be not one but two of the best guitar players in metal history. You have to maintain first-take energy even though you might be on the sixth hour of the last section and your ears are dead like corn flakes. That being said, it's not hard to get up for any session – it just takes its toll on you after a few hours of meticulous reconstruction."

HERO:

KEY TRACKS:

(*Guitar Hero*
(*Guitar Hero*)
Hero... - KISS '75
Hero Encore Rocks The 80s)

GO-TO GEAR:

(*Guitar*
(*Guitar*)

A day job as RedOctane's official "rocksultant" for the *GH* series helped cement his rep, and things snowballed from there – concert appearances with the Video Games Live tour; studio sessions with Buckethead and Bootsy Collins; guitar lessons at *GuitarInstructor.com* and a DVD due out from Hal Leonard this fall; and endorsement deals with the likes of

Nick Gallant

IF YOU MADE A LIST of the people you wanted to be when you grew up, Nick Gallant would be at least three of them. A full-time producer at WaveGroup, Gallant sang on two dozen tracks, played guitar on three dozen, and laid down bass on a whopping 53 songs for *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*. He also mixed nearly half the tracks in *Guitar Hero II*, wrote and records his own songs in his off hours, studied classical guitar at UC Santa Cruz, and rapped it into a degree from the Berklee College of Music. But the thing that put him on the musical path was pure rock and roll hedonism. "I was watching the video for 'Sweet Child O' Mine' with my friend, and saw Slash play the guitar solo, and was like, 'Oh, that looks kind of fun,'" says Gallant. "Plus, there was some cute chick in the video that was clearly into longhaired dudes that played guitar, and since I already had long hair, all I needed to do was learn the guitar."

Even with talent and sheepskins in hand, Gallant came to WaveGroup as a humble intern, literally filing papers and cleaning toilets while quietly impressing Will Littlejohn with his mixing and musical skills as much as his work ethic and humility. ("He's like, 'He can't be an intern, he's like Superman,'" says Littlejohn.) He was officially hired within two weeks and immediately rolled up his sleeves to contribute a little

Krank, VHT, Digitech, and EMG, the last of which honored him with his own signature set of pickups. But the ultimate payoff comes this fall with his own guitar: the Epiphone Apparition (see page 90). That should make up for the missing white Gibson Flying V he used on "Laid to Rest" and "Monkey Wrench" – that one's currently on loan to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. "It still hasn't really hit home yet that my guitar is in the Hall," he says. "It's an honor I can't explain because I still hardly believe it myself... but it's in there right next to some legends. It's unreal!"

Ultimately, the outrageous good fortune hasn't spoiled Henderson yet; he's humble and appreciative of everything the little game with the plastic guitar has afforded him. "The success of *Guitar Hero* inevitably became one of those high-water mark moments you dream of," he says. "Corny as it sounds, it makes every night of practice, the paralyzing moments of self-doubt, and that glorious moment in the sun all that more worthwhile when it happens. Being heard and appreciated in any way is an incredible feeling, and I'm eternally grateful to have been able to rock for the world." ☀

Lance Taber

LIKE MOST OF THE KIDS of my day, I received my musical marching orders from The Beatles," says Taber, who started playing guitar when he was 7 or 8. "The White Album, Abbey Road, and Let It Be in particular are the trio of albums that formed my guitar playing sensibilities. These albums are just awash with great guitar playing and guitar tones. And of course, there are all of those great songs."

Re-creating great songs for *Guitar Hero* is one thing; adding onto the legendary work of other players is something else entirely. "Sometimes I'd get requests from the producer to play additional fills and guitar solos that weren't in the original versions," he explains. "For example, the David Bowie song 'Ziggy Stardust' didn't have a guitar solo, so the producer wanted me to compose one for the GH version to enhance gameplay. However, I felt the guitar solo would have to be faithful to the musical era in which the song was recorded, so that's how I approached it. For most of the tunes I always tried to get the guitar sounds and the feel as close to the recordings as I could without sacrificing the inspiration and spontaneity necessary for an exciting performance."

In fact, Taber bases that performance not on transcriptions but on sound. "Tone really is everything," he says. "I might spend a whole session learning the tune and dialing in the appropriate tones for each guitar part. This is usually the most time-consuming part of the process for me. If the tone isn't right, then the guitar performance won't sound right either."

The original guitarist for Bourgeois Tagg before the band got signed, Taber met WaveGroup's Will Littlejohn as they were both gigging in northern California band in the

mid-80s, and Taber's been one of Littlejohn's go-to session guys ever since. But Taber lives in Sacramento — a good two hours away from WaveGroup in Fremont — so he often records his parts at home. And when he rocks out, he rocks out politely. "I'd like to say that I had a truckload of amps and cabinets at my disposal, but I live in a townhouse with neighbors on both sides of me," he admits. "I record all of my tracks using the POD xt Live and headphones. Even my boutique-amp-enthusiast friends grudgingly have had to admit that the POD xt has sounded great on all of these recordings. Frankly, I couldn't have done all of these songs without it."

But technology can only get a player so far, and for some of the *Guitar Hero* tracks, Taber has had to change more than his POD patches. "Stevie Ray Vaughan's 'Texas Flood' took me two days to record because he played with such a strong touch, and I normally play with a light touch," says Taber. "My initial takes sounded a bit light and wimpy, so I had to put heavier strings on my guitar and learn how to shake those heavier strings with conviction. My wrists and fingers were really sore after I finished, but I think I recorded a good homage to Stevie Ray that still felt like a genuine performance as well. And," he adds, "I got no hate mail from Stevie's fans, which was really a good sign." ☀

HERO:
KEY TRACKS:
Guitar Hero
'Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks The
House'
GO-TO GEAR:

HERO:
KEY TRACKS:
Guitar Hero III
'Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks The
House'
GO-TO GEAR:

HERO:
KEY TRACKS:
Guitar Hero
'Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks The
House'
GO-TO GEAR:

bit of everything to *Karaoke Revolution Country* and *GHII*.

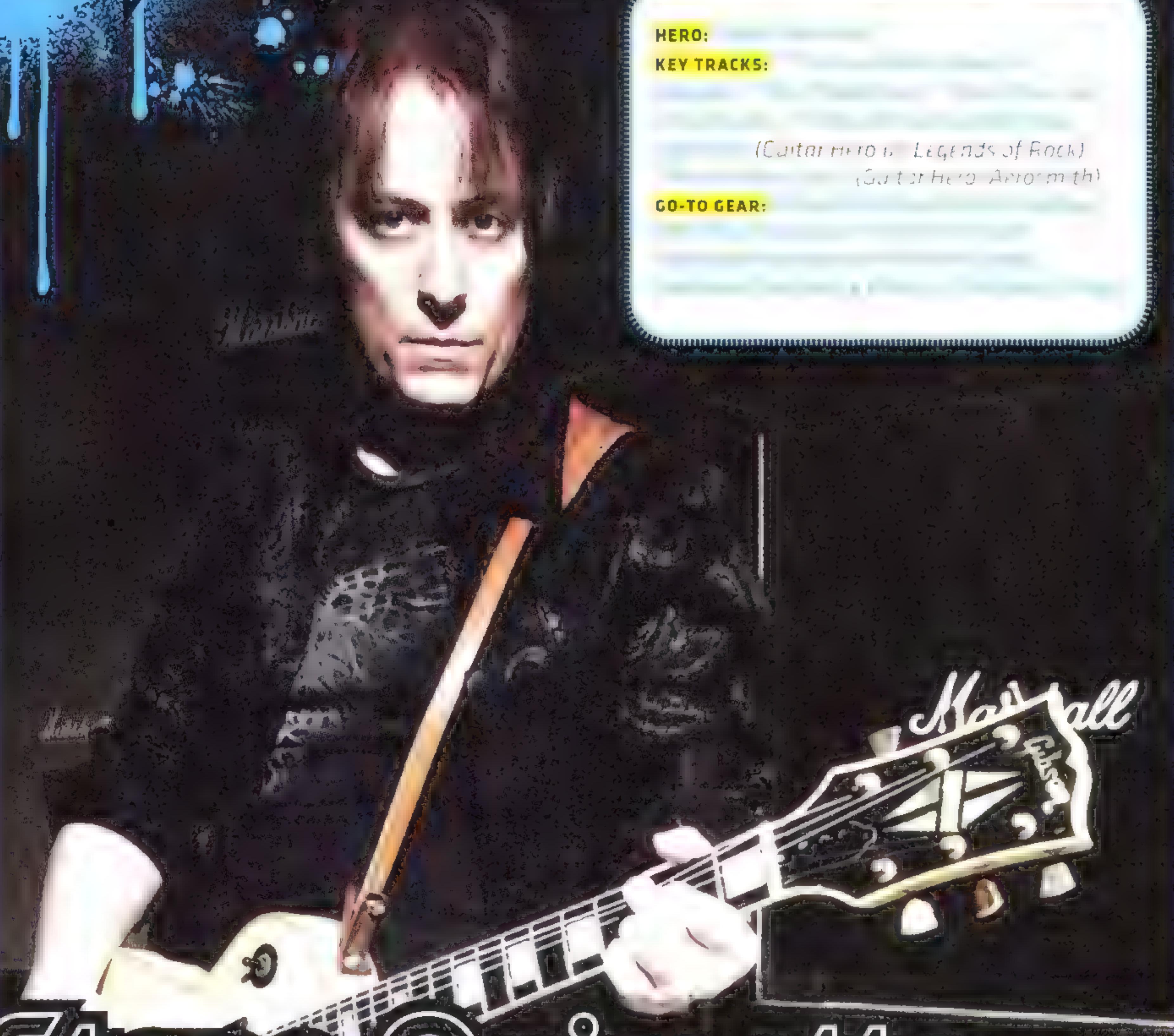
Being a WaveGroup full-timer comes with both benefits and drawbacks. "I have a bit more flexibility with my time in terms of recording, since I record myself and I much prefer to work alone," says Gallant. "The real downside to that is I may take a lot longer than I should, because I don't have an engineer or producer saying, 'Hey, you had it two takes ago.' I am a bit of a perfectionist, especially when it comes to solos. For 'Carry On Wayward Son,' I was in the studio for 14 hours. Sometimes you get a song that takes 30 minutes — 'Search and Destroy' took about 25 to 30 minutes, once I got the tone I wanted."

Perfecting the tone on the game covers can be time consuming, but the same goes for nailing the technique. "It can often be so much harder to re-create someone's guitar parts that were slightly improvised and don't follow any particular pattern," notes Gallant. "When the original guitarist was shooting from the hip, it means my job takes a lot more time. There are definitely creative approaches to recreating someone's style, though; I played part of the solo on 'Tattooed Love Boys' with a beer bottle."

Despite "95-hour weeks" at WaveGroup during crunch times, Gallant has found the time to not only start scoring a feature film but also write and record a self-titled debut album, which was released on iTunes this year. "Over the years, I would say my romance with chops and technique has fizzled," he admits. "I am far more enamored with songwriting these days. But when a friend introduces me to someone as 'the guy from *Guitar Hero*,' I do feel a sense of pride. I think that really stems from the fact that I generally like what I do for a living. If a friend was to introduce me instead as 'the guy who makes music all day,' I think I would feel just as proud." ☀



The Real Heroes



Steve Ouimette

WHILE FREMONT, CALIFORNIA, can legitimately claim to be the birthplace of the *Guitar Hero* recordings, not all of the franchise's tracks were recorded at WaveGroup. Steve Ouimette operates out of his own studio in Scottsdale, Arizona, and contributed over a dozen tracks to *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock*. "I've been under the radar for most of my career," admits Ouimette, who's been playing guitar for 28 years. "It was *GHIII* that really opened the doors for me, so things are just getting rolling."

Maybe it's all relative: For Ouimette, "just getting rolling" means a rich career of creating music for games, movies, and television and owning his own studio. When Neversoft took the reins of the *GH* franchise, Ouimette was prepared to help deliver what was needed, even with insane time limits. "For most of the songs I usually have either a set of them given to me and maybe a month to complete them," he explains. "For others, especially the downloadable content, I've had some pretty short deadlines. For 'We Three Kings,' I got the call on a Wednesday and the song had to be turned in the next Monday. That's probably the one that I'm most proud of because I was really pushed and had to get on it."

Ouimette says that usually involves mapping out the tempo in Pro Tools, finding a drummer and a vocalist who can handle the song, and "research, research, research. I go through magazines, YouTube, DVDs, CDs, etc. to find out everything I can about the song and how it was recorded. Every bit of information is helpful down to the string gauge. I'm a serious stickler for matching the exact amp, guitar, cab, pedals,

HERO:
KEY TRACKS:

(*Guitar Hero I: Legends of Rock*)
(*Guitar Hero: Aerosmith*)

GO-TO GEAR:



Doug Doppler

WHEN YOU'VE GOT the personal and professional relationships that come with 37 years of guitar playing, you're bound to be at the right place at the right time for some part of your life. For Doug Doppler, one of those moments was at the altar. Well, sort of. "I first met Will Littlejohn at Darryl Anders' wedding," says Doppler, who was a bandmate of the groom. But it was Doppler's playing skill – particularly on his CD *Nu Instrumental* – that got him invited to WaveGroup some years later. "The REAL audition came when Will called everybody in for a round of *Guitar Hero!*" says Doppler with a laugh.

A GIT graduate and one-time student of Joe Satriani, Doppler ultimately became a fellow instructor and launched his own series of instructional videos, *Guitar 411*. Doppler's technical expertise proved a valuable asset to WaveGroup, which needed a top-notch player who could capture the hairy, lawless days of Reagan-era metal for the toughest songs of *Rock: the 80s*. "Extreme's 'Play with Me' was definitely the hardest track I worked on," says Doppler. "The solo has a ton of sixteenth notes played at more than 200 beats per minute – really fast, and all double-tracked. The WaveGroup team



Darryl Anders

HERO:
KEY TRACKS:

(Guitar Hero)

(Guitar Hero II)

(Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock)

GO-TO GEAR:

HERO:
KEY TRACKS:

Guitar Hero Encore: Rock The 80s
GO-TO GEAR:

are all very accomplished musicians, so they got a big laugh out of assigning me this song. They didn't have a problem letting me know how hard they thought I was going to have to work to pull it off – and they were right! I spent a week breaking the solo into pieces and working them up to tempo from 80 bpm so I could play them smoothly and with feel. I've never had to take that amount of time to work up ANY piece. THAT was hard!"

Like many of the other *GH* session players, Doppler strives to re-create the feel of the original recordings, even if that means reproducing some of their flaws. "One of the rhythm tracks [on a song I was covering] was surprisingly bad, although the song itself rocks super hard. In that case, I did my best to keep the feel of the part, not make it sound like some studio guy who decided to play the part 'right.' For some tracks, like White Lion's version of 'Radar Love,' it was more about recapturing something completely organic: feedback. 'Feedback always has a pitch, and sometimes that pitch changes while you're holding the note out,' explains Doppler. "Getting a note

to feed back to the right pitch – and then change to the next pitch at the right time, just as it did on the original recording – is no walk in the park. I think it took the most time to capture Vito Bratta's feel compared to the other guitarists. I learned a lot doing that track." But no matter how much effort a player puts into copying someone else's style, sometimes you simply can't hide whose hands are really playing the licks. "A friend was playing *GH* with his son and when he heard 'Play with Me,' he could tell it was me," says Doppler. "I was pretty blown away, but I guess I didn't morph into Nuno as well as I should have!"

Doppler hasn't slowed down since his stint with *Guitar Hero* – laying down tracks for his next instrumental album, sharing stages with Satriani and Steve Vai, and occasionally touring the world. "I just returned from China where I did an Ibanez clinic tour," he reports. "The audiences in China were nothing short of amazing – the best I've ever played for." He's also working on a new installment of the *Guitar 411* series aimed directly at *Guitar Hero* gamers who want to move up to the real deal. "A whole new generation of musicians is excited about the guitar because of this game," says Doppler. "There were three teenage *GH* fanatics who showed up in the front row at my last Ibanez clinic and asked great questions – I know they're practicing by the questions they ask. They're hungry to learn about the guitar itself, and it's exciting to see." ☀

"IRONICALLY, MORE PEOPLE recognize me from *Guitar Hero* than most anything else I have ever done," admits bassist Darryl Anders, who hasn't exactly been hiding. A musician for 25 years and an in-demand session player in the California Bay Area, Anders grew up in St. Petersburg, Florida, absorbing every kind of music he could find along the way – jazz, funk, country, rock, and gospel. Anders cites jazz pianist Charlie Peacock and Meters drummer Zigaboo Modeliste as inspirations, but Louis Johnson of the Brothers Johnson was his primary bass influence – "that sound knocked me out. And Marcus Miller, Willie Weeks, and Jimmy Haslip inspire me every day to practice my instrument and respect my craft."

Anders met Will Littlejohn when they were both active in the Sacramento music scene, and after successful collaborations on the *Karaoke Revolution* projects, the call for *Guitar Hero* was a natural, even if it wasn't always easy. Some of the tracks required Anders to master the technique, equipment, and vibe of vastly different musicians on as little as 24 hours notice. "Working on the games has made me a better bass player because I have had to really work to cop the tone, feel and the essence of music that was really outside my comfort zone," he says. "I am most proud of my work on 'YYZ.' A good friend of mine said I'd never be able to play that song – 'it's not your deal.' But I refused to let that song kick my ass. So I locked myself in my studio the night before I was due to record the song and stayed there until I figured the song out. It is definitely the performance I am most proud of."

In addition to gigs with luminaries like Tower of Power and Eric Martin (of Mr. Big), Anders leads his own band, AgapeSoul, and will be heading into the studio to record his own CD later this year. In the meantime, he's happy to provide the bottom line for *GH* whenever he's needed. "These games have exposed an entirely new generation of kids to great music that they otherwise would never have heard of," he says. "Whatever sparks the desire to pick up a guitar or bass and wanna rock is a good thing." ☀





A HERO in the Making

THE SMASH HIT VIDEOGAME HAS RAKED IN OVER \$1BILLION TO DATE, AND WITH GUITAR HERO: AEROSMITH AVAILABLE NOW, WE DECIDED IT WAS TIME WE MET THE SIX-STRING TALENT BEHIND IT, MARCUS HENDERSON...

» Interview by Claire Davies » Photos by Ash Newell

The Games

The Gear

THE GUITARISTS

81

When Gibson released the SG back in 1961, you can bet your ass they didn't envisage millions of people hammering away on a plastic version more than 40 years later as part of a videogame. Originally released in late 2005 on PlayStation 2, *Guitar Hero* is the music videogame that has taken the world by storm.

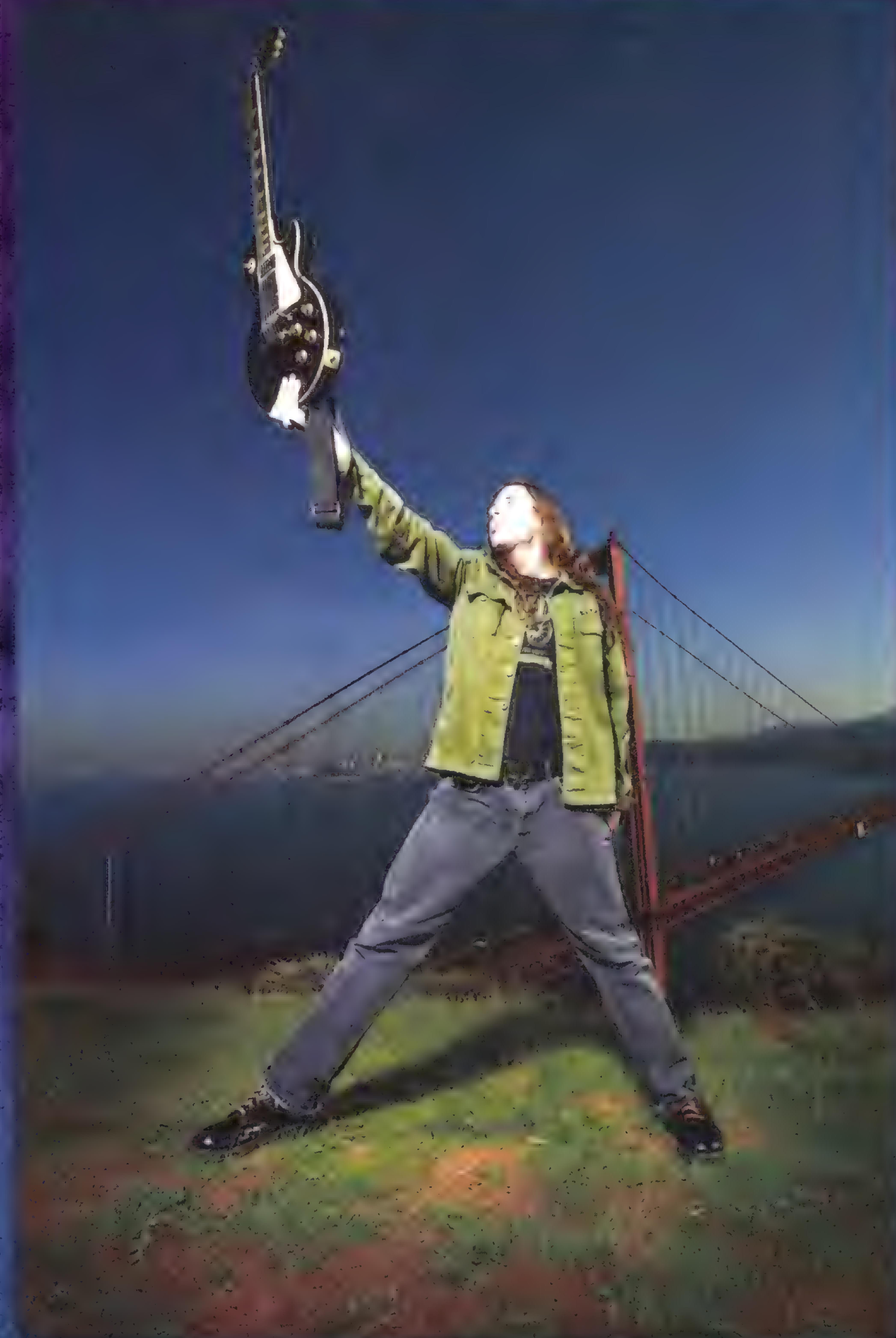
After tons of emails from you guys splitting the vote on whether the game rocks or sucks for 'real' guitarists, we decided to go to the one person who has played on every edition of *Guitar Hero* so far, San Franciscan Marcus Henderson. Having built an enviable reputation on his home turf as a killer rock and metal guitarist, Henderson is responsible for the majority of guitar tracks you'll hear when playing the various editions of *Guitar Hero*. Pantera, Megadeth and Avenged Sevenfold tracks among them.

More and more people are tuning in to Henderson's guitar talents each day, so his star is most definitely on the rise. Not only does he have a series of tuitional DVDs (*Guitar Heroics*, Hal Leonard) due for release this autumn, but Henderson is also gearing up for the release of his brand-new signature guitar, the Epiphone Marcus Henderson Apparition. Oh, and did we mention his 2005 Gibson Flying V has recently been featured in the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame? Yep, as part of the *Guitar Hero* exhibition at the RRHOF museum in Cleveland, Ohio, Henderson's guitar graces the same space as six-strings played by Johnny Cash and Kurt Cobain.

Henderson is nothing if not insanely enthusiastic about guitar playing, so we knew there was no-one else we wanted to talk to about the phenomenon of *Guitar Hero* other than the man himself.

Some readers will be unaware of you, so tell us about yourself as a guitarist...

"Well, I got my first guitar at the age of 14, which was this cheap, piece of shit pawn-shop type guitar, and I have the worst ADD of anyone I know! I didn't really pay attention in school, but I managed to graduate with a certificate of completion for a couple of local community college courses in jazz harmony and group performance or whatever. But honestly, it was just a lame excuse





"I THOUGHT THE GAME COULD EITHER BE AN INCREDIBLE HIT OR IT COULD PISS OFF AN ENTIRE GENERATION OF GUITARISTS"

to go there and find other players to rock out with after class!

"I was into everything when I was younger... I had a Maiden *Powerslave* poster on my wall and stuff, but at the same time punk rock was happening and I started listening to bands like Minor Threat, Government Issue and Agnostic Front. My first band was a punk band - young and aggressive 'get out there and kick ass' type of stuff. At the same time I've always loved metal and hardcore, so I wanted to mix it up. I never gravitated towards the big shred guys like Vai and Yngwie. I loved the hell out of them, but Dr Know from Bad Brains really kicked my ass."

So how did you land the *Guitar Hero* gig?

"I was hired through a mutual friend to work at WaveGroup Sound [studios] for the *Guitar Hero* sessions and we ended up recording most of the franchise there. I had a call one morning out of the blue from the *Guitar Hero*

guys asking me to throw down a Megadeth song for this new videogame they were working on. Obviously at the time I didn't know it was *Guitar Hero*, but when they told me I was like, 'You gotta be shitting me!' I mean, I've been a videogamer ever since Atari and Nintendo came out and I've been a life-long guitar player too, so I was like, 'Man, I've been custom fucking designed for this game!' I knocked that Megadeth song ("Symphony Of Destruction") out in a couple of days and they then put me to work doing the majority of the songs. I ended up doing 20 of the 30 songs for the first game, and from there it just went crazy."

When *Guitar Hero* first explained the concept of the game, what did you think of it?

"I thought, 'This game could either be an incredible hit, or it could miss so widely that it pisses off an entire generation of guitar players.' I saw *Guitar Hero* develop from split cell organisms into the incredible multi-faceted

monster it is today. I remember seeing some of the first pictures and how no-one had a clue what the game play would be like. I got scared because I thought, 'This is gonna be a death blow to all us guitar players who take this seriously as a lifestyle'. But then I played the game and my jaw hit the floor - I've never experienced anything so instantly fun!"

Did you know how to play the tracks you were asked to record, or did you have to learn them from scratch?

"I had the foundations for a lot of the songs, but by and large I had to re-learn everything they threw at me. And it's not like anyone gives me a chart or whatever for each new song! I have to sit there and pick it up by ear, transcribe it myself and then break it down to get all the inflections and the 'humanness' that makes individual guitar players who they are."

What kind of research do you need to do before starting work on a track?

"There's a lot of analysis to begin with. I'll get an MP3, which will be the 'official reference MP3'; and it's a lot of brain-work from there on out. I'll throw on the song and within a few minutes I'll try to answer all of these questions: what year was the song recorded, who was the producer and what gear was used? If I know the year the track was recorded, I know the production technique and from there I can work out the gear angle. We have to identify the exact gear used on each original track and then go out and either find that gear or try to recreate the effect. We're fully dedicated! You need to accrue all these little elements to make up the big picture, so we find gear from the big stuff all the way down to little things like pickups and tube grids. It's a gnarly procedure, but *Guitar Hero* fans love the games so much and that's the motivator for me."

What was the hardest track you've had to learn for any of the *Guitar Hero* editions so far?

"You can learn anything with time, but being only human you'll get closer to nailing something one day but then you'll have to set it down for a few days and come back to it. Out of all the tracks, I'd

say "Revolution Is My Name" by Pantera was a pain in the ass. It was in Dime tuning, which is like 10 cents below C sharp or something weird like that. That took a couple of days to nail... "Hangar 18" [by Megadeth] was a pain in the ass too because we had to double track everything."

Can you really play "Through the Fire and Flames" by DragonForce?

"In real life, yeah! There are definite techniques in that song and it's certainly fast, but speed intimidates people. I'm more scared of the game version! I'd shit myself if I had to play that song all the way through on *Guitar Hero*... I'm not as good as I'd like to be at the game, but I think [the reason why guitarists find it difficult to play] is that it comes down to the muscles you use for playing real guitar - especially if you've spent years working on your technique. It's like, all of a sudden here's a game that takes you out of what you're used to doing on a real guitar."

Do you think playing *Guitar Hero* can benefit you as a real guitar player?

"If you've never picked up a guitar, you're not used to the motions of it, just like when you first pick up a baseball bat and you're not used to it. When you start swinging that bat, your body gets used to the motion and you start experiencing what it's like to wield it. Well, *Guitar Hero* gives you a sense of rhythm and starts moving your hands in the general direction a guitar would."

Do you worry that kids prefer to spend hours playing AC/DC songs on plastic guitars rather than learning them for real?

"Not at all. Before *Guitar Hero* kids wouldn't have given a shit about AC/DC. Now we have their attention. At least now there's a guitar-shaped thing in their hand. One day it could even result in them playing guitar for real. The possibility that some kid might become a real guitar hero from being inspired by this game floors me. If one kid picks up a guitar because of *Guitar Hero*, it's one more than we had before. The next generation of guitarists has to come from somewhere and, as for me, I hope they come from the *Guitar Hero* generation!" ☺



GUITARS
AND GAMING

THE GEAR

AFTER PLAYING GUITAR HERO AND ROCK BAND, MANY OF YOU WILL GET THE ITCH TO TRY A REAL AXE ON FOR SIZE. HERE'S A COMPLETE GUIDE TO BUYING A REAL GUITAR, BASS AND AMP, COMPLIMENTS OF THE EXPERTS AT GUITAR WORLD MAGAZINE.





GETTING INTO GEAR

Whether you're a hardcore, high-scoring gamer, serious student of the six-string, or a bit of both, a little new equipment might be just what you need to reach the next level.

GEAR FOR GAMERS

ROCK BAND STAGE KIT

\$99, WWW.PDP.COM

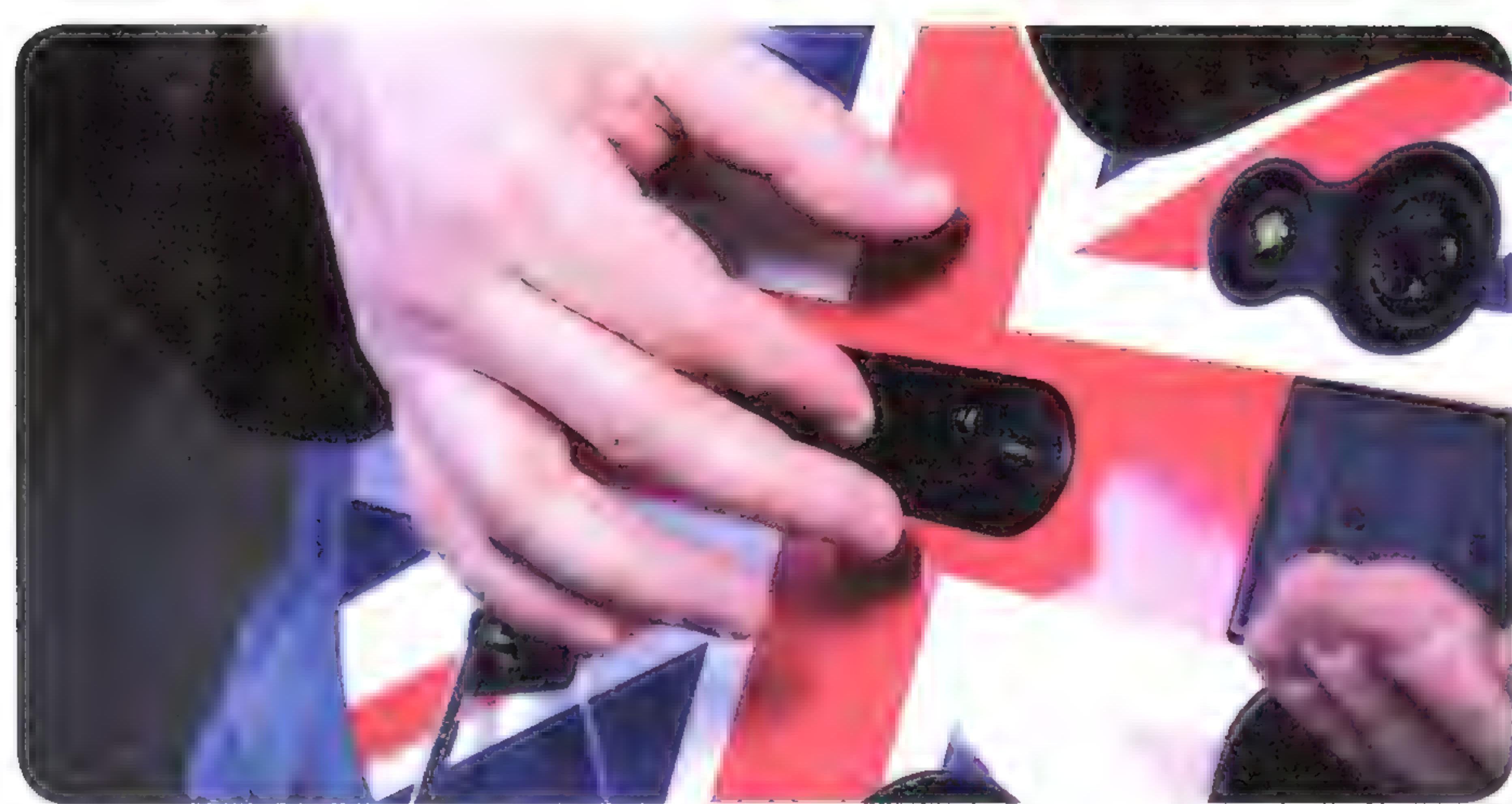
Every good rock show features lights and smoke to go with the sounds — and now yours can too. Together with Harmonix, PDP has crafted the Rock Band Stage Kit, a smoke-and-lights combo that plugs into your 360 via a USB cable and reads each track as you play it. The kit's brain finds the song cues for dramatic effects, triggers the fog, then sets off an array of complementary LED and strobe lights through the haze in perfect time. The Stage Kit works with every single song in *Rock Band* (including downloaded ones) as well as the forthcoming *Rock Band 2*. You get a starter bottle of fog juice that should last several sessions, and you can always buy refills. Sexy groupies and stinky tour bus not included...yet.



GUITAR HERO RECHARGE KIT

\$14.99, WWW.REDOCTANE.COM

What's your problem with Mother Nature, anyway? That wireless Les Paul controller eats batteries at an alarming rate, but for a small investment, it doesn't have to. This custom-made li-polymer battery and USB charger plugs right into your console while you play, charging with impressive speed. You'll get several hours of game time out of each charge. Pick up another battery for \$10, charge one while you're using the other, and never run out of juice again.



GUITAR HERO III FACEPLATES

\$14.99, WWW.REDOCTANE.COM

Designed for the *Guitar Hero III* Les Paul controller, these faceplates give your classic black guitar an all-new look in seconds. RedOctane's released 18 different designs (so far) from classic hot-rod flames and radical zebra stripes to tasteful burled maple and blueburst finishes. And nothing says "I bought the downloadable Def Leppard Track Pack" quite like a Union Jack faceplate!

PEAVEY AG RIFFMASTER

\$399, WWW.PEAVEY.COM/CONTROLLER/

Take a real Peavey guitar, replace all those pickups and strings with *Guitar Hero*'s colored buttons and strum bar, festoon it with custom graphics of legendary rock bands, and wham – you've got the AG RiffMaster. The controller not only retains the shape, size, and satisfying heft of a real guitar; it also retains the chrome tuners, fixed bridge, and humbucking pickup for an authentic look. Choose limited-edition finishes celebrating artists like Kiss, Pantera, and Lynyrd Skynyrd, or hit the Peavey custom shop online and upload your own graphics for a one-of-a-kind controller built to order. Right now the AG RiffMaster is available for PS2, but PS3, Xbox 360, and Wii versions will be ready shortly.



GEAR FOR GUITARISTS



FRETLIGHT FG-451 PRO ELECTRIC GUITAR

\$899, WWW.FRETLIGHT.COM

Fretlight's slogan – "See how good you can *really* be" – seems like a direct call to all those *Guitar Hero* players who are ready to stop playing games and start playing guitar. Install the software on your PC, connect the guitar via USB, and watch as lights glow inside the guitar's fretboard itself, showing you where to put your fingers. Interactive lessons walk you through everything from the very basics up through complicated chords and scales, lighting up dots on the fretboard along the way. We tried out the highest-priced Pro model with its lovely maple top, but if you're a newbie, the \$399 acoustic or \$499 standard electric offer the same functionality. Optional software add-ons give you advanced lessons and play-along songs from artists like AC/DC and Led Zeppelin – two artists you sadly won't find in *Guitar Hero*.

EMG 85 AND EMG 81 HUMBUCKING ACTIVE PICKUPS

\$105 EACH, WWW.EMGPICKUPS.COM

EMG is the official pickup of *Guitar Hero: World Tour*, not to mention the personal choice of *GH* shredder Marcus Henderson. Thanks to an internal preamp, active EMG pickups are renowned for their low noise and clear tones. They're designed to be direct replacements to upgrade your original pickups, and Quik-Connect cables make swapping in new tonal options ridiculously easy. Pro guitarists like Zakk Wylde, David Gilmour, Kerry King, and Kirk Hammett all choose EMG. For a classic humbucker setup, try an EMG 85 in the neck and an 81 in the bridge.

YAMAHA PACIFICA PAC102

\$150, WWW.YAMAHA.COM/GUITARS

Everybody knows there's a direct relationship between what you get and how much you pay for it. That's what makes the Pacifica such an intriguing guitar – there's no way it should sound this good or feel this comfortable for the low price. Unlike a lot of "starter" electrics, it's hard to outgrow this guitar, thanks to a versatile combination of pickups, a comfortable neck, and traditional styling with enough of a twist to not make it boring. Time-tested and true, the PAC102 is the most affordable axe in the line, and while it's only available in a handful of colors – black, blue, and red – they're the ones you want anyway.



LINE 6 POCKET POD

\$130, LINE6.COM/POCKETPOD

What can't you do with this fist-sized kidney bean thing? The Pocket POD offers 32 classic guitar amp tones in a portable package, including hundreds of presets and signature sounds from bands like As I Lay Dying, Maroon 5, and Killswitch Engage. Most beginning players use it as a headphone amp for private practice – just plug in your guitar and some earbuds and you're set. A little later, it's perfect for recording original licks in a home studio. In a live situation, plug it into the front of your regular amp to get 16 different effects. And if you feel adventurous, download some free software from Line 6 and custom sculpt the Pocket POD's tones to your own tastes. It's a lot of utility for very little money.



GEAR FOR BOTH

COFFIN CASE GH-25 GUITAR HERO CONTROLLER CASE

\$39, WWW.COFFINCASE.COM

COFFIN CASE G-185

\$99, WWW.COFFINCASE.COM

Guitar Hero will live forever – how about your controller? That flimsy bag RedOctane sells might as well be a potato sack compared to the GH-25. Vinyl embossed skull-and-crossbones designs cover the outside of this coffin-shaped gig bag, and the quilted burgundy interior elicits a strong "whoa" factor the first time it's seen. There's a small pouch for your memory card and some spare batteries. Also, it's worth noting that this case was designed for the X-Plorer and Les Paul, but it won't fit Rock Band Stratocasters (the company's working on a different case for that). When you're ready to rock on a real guitar, keep your morbid aesthetic going with a real Coffin Case to match. The G-185 has just been redesigned; its velvet interior features improved padding to offer better protection and a super-snug fit. Plus, the cool factor can't be underestimated – definitely better than a potato sack.





PERRI'S LEATHERS GUITAR STRAPS

\$10 AND UP, WWW.PERRIS.CA

Those twisty, gnarly, skinny straps that come with your game controllers HAVE to go. Perri's offers a slew of solutions in leather, nylon, and suede – everything from heavy metal studs to leopard print to airbrushed hot-rod flames. A 3-inch wide strap might be a little support overkill for the lightweight guitar controllers, but dammit, this is about style.

HERCULES GS422B GUITAR STAND

\$84.95, WWW.HERCULESSTANDS.COM

You wouldn't dump your new guitar on the floor; why do it to your game controllers? Keep both safe with this innovative guitar stand, which uses the natural weight of your guitar (or fake guitar) to lock your precious into place. The stand folds away for storage, can be easily adjusted, and holds guitars for two bandmates.



BAWLS GUARANA ENERGY DRINKS

\$32 FOR A CASE OF 24 BOTTLES,
WWW.BAWLS.COM

Whether you're gearing up for *Rock Band*'s Endless Setlist or a full day of bashing out power chords in the garage, you're going to need to be awake and alert the whole time. We've tried a few gallons of energy drinks, and we still like Bawls the best. The caffeine level of Bawls is higher than soda but not as high as most energy drinks, which results in less crashes and a license to drink one after the other. We prefer the distinctive 10-ounce bumpy blue bottles over the 16-ounce cans, but hey – it's what's inside that counts.

The Epiphone APPARITION

Guitar Hero's Marcus Henderson presents the ultimate weapon in the war against lousy guitar tone – his signature guitar

"I used to dream about having a model of my own ever since I was a kid," says Marcus Henderson, shredding session ace from the *Guitar Hero* games. "I would envision myself ruling the wasteland on my own killer guitar, custom-made to fulfill all of my tonal fantasies. Only when I was a kid, my dream guitar had a TV on it, so I could watch cartoons and jam at the same time."

Henderson – practically a cartoon character himself – will see his dreams come true soon with the arrival of the Apparition, tentatively due out before the end of this year. "Basically, Epiphone let me go nuts," he says. "It's styled after my first electric guitar that I had when I was 14, which was an Explorer knock-off. I guess this is a tribute to that in a few ways, but it also reflects 20 years of playing and the technical requirements of different playing scenarios."

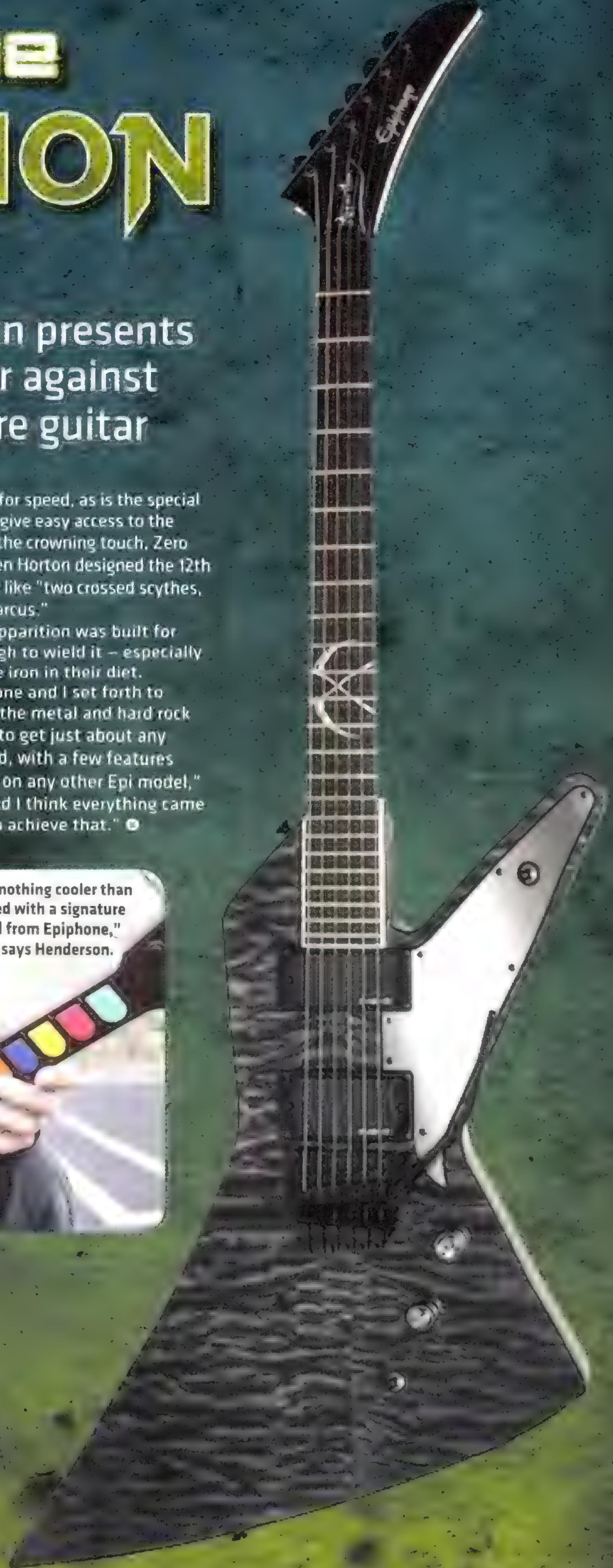
"This mahogany-bodied monster is no mere nostalgia trip. The design subtly and intentionally recalls a reader's scythe, but the mahogany body and figured maple top aren't just for show. I wanted a tighter body taper in the middle for control and a deeper cut on the end of the top end for clarity," says Henderson. "It's very well balanced, physically and tonally, and the sustain is ridiculous. If you play it long enough, you hear that it's sustainably sick."

The guitar, built by the Zuma team, will be

fingerboard are built for speed, as is the special cutaway designed to give easy access to the higher frets. And for the crowning touch, Zero Skateboards artist Ben Horton designed the 12th fret inlay logo to look like "two crossed scythes, forming an 'M' for Marcus."

Ultimately, the Apparition was built for anybody brave enough to wield it – especially those eager for more iron in their diet. "The team at Epiphone and I set forth to design a guitar that the metal and hard rock specialist could use to get just about any range of metal sound, with a few features that are unavailable on any other Epi model," Henderson says, "and I think everything came together perfectly to achieve that."

"There is nothing cooler than being honored with a signature guitar model from Epiphone," says Henderson.



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BUY OR DIE





How to Buy an ELECTRIC GUITAR

A GUIDE FOR THE FIRST-TIME BUYER

» *By Chris Gill*

Unless you have a time machine that can transport you and your credit card back to 1958, there's never been a better time than the present to buy a new electric guitar. Even the most inexpensive instruments sound and play great, but having so many wonderful options at your disposal can distract you from finding the perfect ax.

So, how do you choose a guitar that will make you happy until you're a rich rock star and every major manufacturer hurls free instruments at your feet? What follows are 10 things you should know before you surrender your hard-earned money to that former Winger member working the floor at your nearby music mega-retailer.

How to Buy a BASS GUITAR

» By Chris Gill

Gunther swung open my office door with a violent jolt and glared at me jealously. He wasn't amused to see me sitting on the couch with a gorgeous blonde creature cradled in my arms. "Ah, detective Watts," he snarled, clutching a cigarette between his wolf-like teeth. "You found what I was looking for."

I looked Gunther square in the eye as I slowly slid my hand along the supple curves of the blonde's body. "Yeah, and you wouldn't believe how cheap this one is," I teased. "Here. Check it out yourself."

Gunther's greasy, greedy hands lustfully prowled the blonde's body. "This feels good," he growled like a warthog. "So gorgeous. Do you mind if I slap her?"

"Go ahead."

Gunther howled, wildly flailing his right hand like Rocky Marciano catching his wife in *flagrante delicto*. The veins in his left hand turned purple as he tightened his grip around the blonde's neck. "That's the kind of action I like!" he shouted. "Please, I've been looking for so long. Let me buy this one from you."

I snatched the blonde beauty back into my arms and snapped at Gunther, "Cool it! I may be a private bass dick, but an old Chinese man once told me something I'll never忘: *Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day. Teach him to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime.*" Well, Gunther, today's not your lucky day. I'm going to show you how to catch the big fish.

"But it's so confusing," Gunther whined. "I don't even know where to begin."

For a bass player, it's like being in the love boat. You've just followed my advice, and you

get a bass of your own that's as sweet and sassy as this beautiful blonde. But this one's mine."

Finding a great bass doesn't have to be a mystery. There are so many well-made, affordable basses on the market today that it's never been easier to find a good instrument. But don't just buy the first bass you get your hands on. There are still problems to be aware of and features to consider to insure that you get the best value and an instrument you'll be happy playing for years to come. Here are some guidelines to help you make the right decision.

TRUE DETECTIVE

Before you set foot in a store, you should have a clear idea of what you want. Doing research in advance will narrow down your options. Check out product reviews on websites and read reviews from friends who have become familiar with the features and specs of various models. Find out what your favorite bassists are playing. However, keep in mind that many players use modified custom shop basses that you won't find on the shelves of your local retailer.

Once you've pinpointed a few basses that appeal to you (either

you can about them. What woods are they made of? What kind of pickups and electronics do they have? How long is the scale? The more familiar you are with specs, the easier it is to identify what features you like. It also will help you communicate your needs to a salesperson. For example, if you find the string spacing on a Precision Bass too wide for your hands, you'll know to ask for a bass with a narrower fingerboard, like a Jazz Bass.

Never let your decisions be influenced exclusively by what your favorite players use, peer pressure or recommendations from a salesperson. You should love the instrument you're going to buy, so don't ignore your animal lust for a particular axe. "You have to have an emotional connection," says bass maker Rob Allen of Rob Allen Guitars. "Choose a bass that you like to look at and always want to play. It's a very personal decision, almost like choosing a mate."

Once you have a good idea what you want, it's time to visit a few stores and try out some basses. Once you're in the store, focus on the basses within your price range, but don't be afraid to try instruments beyond your budget. Trying a more expensive bass can give you a great perspective on how a well-crafted bass is superior to a basic and budgeted-out instrument.

the neck feels, what the finish looks like and how carefully the hardware is installed, and compare these features to the basses you can afford. If an instrument you've selected seems similar to a much more expensive axe, chances are it's a great value.

NECK AND NECK

Examine the neck first. Run your fretting hand along the neck and note how well it fits in your hand. Does the fingerboard feel too wide or narrow? Is it easy to play or do you struggle to fret notes? Don't worry if you don't know how to play or are just a beginner. If the instrument doesn't feel comfortable in your hands it's probably not right for you.

"Check how the instrument feels," recommends MTD's Michael Tobias. "If an instrument doesn't play well from the start, chances are it never will. Have the salesperson make sure that the instrument is set up properly. If it isn't, ask if the store can set it up for you."

Try playing the bass both sitting down and standing up. Strap on the bass and release your hands. If the neck slides down and points to the ground, the neck is too heavy. While a bass with a heavy neck may be perfectly

playable, it will cause muscle fatigue more quickly because your fretting hand is supporting the neck. Some body shapes don't fit comfortably on your lap. If you plan on using the bass for practice or recording situations when you'll be sitting down, you should consider another instrument.

Next, play notes on every fret on every string as well as the open strings to check for buzzing and dead spots. If you can't play well, bring along a friend who plays or your bass instructor. If any open strings buzz but the buzzing disappears when you hold down that string at the first fret, the nut is probably cut too deep and will need to be replaced. Buzzing frets are sometimes caused by a bad setup, which you can easily fix, but they may also be caused by bad fretwork or a warped or twisted neck, which are very expensive to fix.

How can you determine if the neck is warped? A bass string at full tension forms a perfectly straight line, so you can use a string as a gauge. Press down the heaviest string so it touches the first and last frets simultaneously and note how the neck aligns with the string. A properly set up neck will have a slight curve, and the string will not touch the frets in between the first and last frets. If there is too much space between the string and frets—say, wider than the string itself—the neck has too much relief and the truss rod needs to be tightened. If all the frets touch the string the neck may be perfectly straight, which is okay, or it could be bowed, which will cause the lower frets to buzz. In this case you'll need to loosen the truss rod (allow only an experienced repairperson to adjust the truss rod). If the neck is bowed in an "S" shape (meaning some frets in the upper or lower section of the neck touch the frets, while the opposite side doesn't touch the frets), the neck is badly warped or twisted, and you should look for another bass.

ANATOMY OF A BASS

Body construction and the neck feature figure prominently when you focus upon buying a bass.

The neck pocket is the area

the neck attaches to the body on a bass with a bolt-on neck (if the neck is glued to the body or the bass has a neck-through-body design, move on to the next item). The neck should fit snugly in the pocket with little or no space between. If you can easily slide anything thicker than a business card between the neck and body, you may want to consider another instrument. Neck pocket gaps decrease harmonic overtones and sustain, resulting in dull, lifeless tone.

The finish Check the paint job for bubbles, dimples, "orange peel" and other defects. While an instrument with a poor paint job can still play and sound great, lack of attention to this detail often means that the overall construction is haphazard.

Body materials The cheapest basses on the market are often constructed of a plywood "butcher block" amalgamation of wood pieces that are glued together, heavily sanded, and covered with a single-piece veneer and a heavy finish. "Some of those instruments can sound good, but it's a crapshoot," says Allen. "Usually the wood is too heavy and doesn't resonate well because it is full of glue, which has no resonant frequency."

Check manufacturer specs for details like a one-, two- or three-piece body. Don't be fooled by terms like "solid" body or "wood" body, as this may not tell the whole story. While it's getting more and more difficult to spot plywood construction, it's often revealed when you look at the finish from a variety of angles. Look for uneven surfaces, separated by straight lines, which are tell-tale signs that various pieces were glued together.

HARD-BOILED HARDWARE

The next areas to examine are the instrument's hardware and electronics. From the bridge

tuners, pickups, controls, control plate/pickguard (if the bass has one) and string trees to see if they are aligned and attached properly. Make sure that none of the screws are stripped or inserted at odd angles.

Adjust the tuning pegs to see how they feel; they should turn smoothly with slight resistance. If they're too stiff or too loose, the instrument will be difficult to tune properly. Lightly tug on the strings near the nut and the bridge—the strings should not pop out of place. If they pull out at the nut, the instrument may not be strung properly (which is easy to rectify) or the nut may be too shallow (which will cost you to fix). If the strings pull out at the bridge, the bridge saddles may be loose or cut too shallow. Avoid any instrument with strings that pop out of place, especially if you have an aggressive playing style.

Turn the knobs and flip the switches. The knobs should turn smoothly without too much or too little resistance. The switches should click into each setting firmly and you should easily be able to tell where they are set.

LISTEN UP, WISE-GUY

Now comes one of the most crucial tests of all—plugging in the bass to hear how it sounds. Don't plug the bass into any old amp. Use an amp you already own or plan on buying. If you haven't made any amp decisions yet, try the bass through a variety of models. An amp's influence is as much as the instrument itself, so if you are considering getting a bass, plug it into a different model than what you'd normally use. The instrument could sound radically different when you readjust the amp.

Check out the sound system again. Plugging the bass up to a decent sound system is a great way to hear what the instrument sounds like.

the knobs and excessively loud pops or clicks while you flick the switches. If you hear these sounds you'll need to replace the controls or find a better bass.

Set the amp to a comfortable volume and turn off any effects. Try all the different pickup and tone control settings. Play up and down the neck on each string. Does the bass sound warm, bright, dull or thin? Do you like the way it sounds? This is the most subjective part of the bass-buying process. A thin-sounding bass could be perfect for a bassist who plays with a large ensemble of musicians because its tone occupies a specific range. A bass with huge tone may be better for a player in a power trio because it covers a wide tonal spectrum. It all depends on your personal preferences and needs. Don't buy a bass with poor tone believing you can fix its sound with another amp, effects or EQ processors. The bass you buy should sound good from the start.

THE STUFF DREAMS ARE MADE OF

By now you should be holding a good bass in your hands. But before you lay down your hard-earned cash, consider saving money a little longer until you can afford an even better model. "Don't be afraid to spend more if an expensive instrument motivates you," suggests Allen. "It's a better investment to buy a bass that you really want to play instead of one that you just like a little. If you're serious about playing, the extra cost will seem insignificant after you've owned the instrument a few years."

Michael Tobias agrees. "You're less likely to outgrow a more expensive instrument," he says. "You could buy a cheaper bass with the intention of upgrading its hardware and electronics, but you'll probably end up spending more money than you would have if you'd bought a better bass to begin with." You never expect to get a good deal on a new instrument, but if you're serious about buying a bass, you should be prepared to pay a little more.

How to Buy an AMP



» By Chris Gill

When shopping for an amp, don't take home the first one you plug into. Sure, that amp may feel really good to play, and you may love how it screams, but are you really going to be happy with it when you wake up tomorrow morning? Here are 10 things you should know before you even consider handing over your money to the amp pimp.

No 1 BYO

Playing an amp with an instrument you don't own is like choosing a girl-friend by dating her mom. Bring your main guitar with you, even if you think the store stocks a similar model. An unfamiliar guitar may have a brighter sound than your personal ax, and an amp that sounded sparkly and lively in the store may actually be dull as Anna Nicole on Quaaludes when you get it home.

No 2 TUBE, SOLID-STATE OR DIGITAL?

While tube technology is still considered state-of-the-art in countries where a potato is regarded as a square meal, these days solid-state and digital amps offer excellent tone for a lot fewer bucks, and with fewer maintenance headaches. However, tube tone is still considered the standard by many top players. Take a blind listening test, and let your ears be the judge.

No 3 SIZE MATTERS

A 100-watt stack is overkill if you live in an apartment and need an amp only for home recording. Conversely, a 10-watt combo is woefully inadequate if you play in a band with a drummer named Thunderbolt. Choose an amp that's right for your primary application. You'll need at least 50 watts for playing live with a rock band, but smaller amps often

provide surprisingly huge sounds in the studio—just ask Jimmy Page.

No 4 THE SOUND OF POWER

Distortion is usually generated by three distinct sources: the power amp, the preamp and the speakers. Many players overlook power amp distortion when trying an amp, but the power amp section is the source of what guitarists describe as low-end chunk and balls. Audition the power amp by turning the master volume way up and turning down the gain. The sound should be lively, with a crisp attack that jiggles your trousers.

No 5 A RIGHTEOUS BUZZ

Preamp, or gain, controls (sometimes called "volume" on master volume-equipped amps) let you dial in impressive-sounding distortion at low volumes, but excessive preamp distortion can sound too compressed and sizzling at high volumes. Turn down the gain and crank up the master volume until the amp is set at the output level you'd normally play at. Now, slowly increase the gain until the sound becomes as distorted as you want it to be. If the tone is buzzy and lacks dynamics, the amp will have all the onstage presence of an American Idol reject.

No 6 HAPP'NIN' CRUNCH

Overdriven speakers create one of the most desirable distortion

characteristics: crunch. The best way to test for this is to dial in a clean setting and turn the volume way up. Low-wattage speakers break up at lower volumes, but they have a tendency to turn to mush at excessive volume levels; high-wattage speakers may not break up at all. Choose a speaker that sounds lively, defined and harmonically rich at volume and distortion levels you'll normally play at.

No 7 MORE TALK ABOUT SPEAKERS

While often overlooked, the speakers are an amp's most crucial component—they're the last thing standing between all that electronic gobbledegook and the sound that reaches your ears (except for yo' mama's fist, but that's another story). Different sized speakers have different tonal characteristics, and you should consider speaker sizes the same way you'd consider an amp's wattage rating. Speakers are like booty—small ones are tighter and big ones have more bottom end. But like a pair of pants, cabinet design can shape bottom end as well. Which is why a closed-back 4x10 cabinet may put out more bass than a 15-inch speaker in an open-back cabinet.

No 8 CHANNEL SURFING

Multichannel amps are great for players who use a lot of different tones (out of all you want is a good

clean sound and a good distorted sound, they may be more amp than you need). If you decide that an amp with three or more channels is right for you, look for one that provides separate EQ controls for each channel.

No 9 TWIST SOME KNOBS

You should be able to dial in a sound you like quickly and easily. Adjust each tone control and note how they interact with each other. If it's too hard to dial in a decent tone in the store, chances are you won't be able to when you get the amp home or onstage.

No 10 ADDITIONAL FEATURES

While tone and volume should be your foremost considerations, you should also determine what extra features you really need. Built-in effects are great if you want a no-hassle, all-in-one package, but they may not be as flexible as external effects pedals and processors. An effect loop is useful for effects like digital reverb and delay, but it's not essential if your effects consists of a few stomp boxes. Line outputs with speaker emulation are helpful for home recording, and external speaker outputs are great for expanding your live rig. Bottom line: don't pay extra for features you'll never use. □

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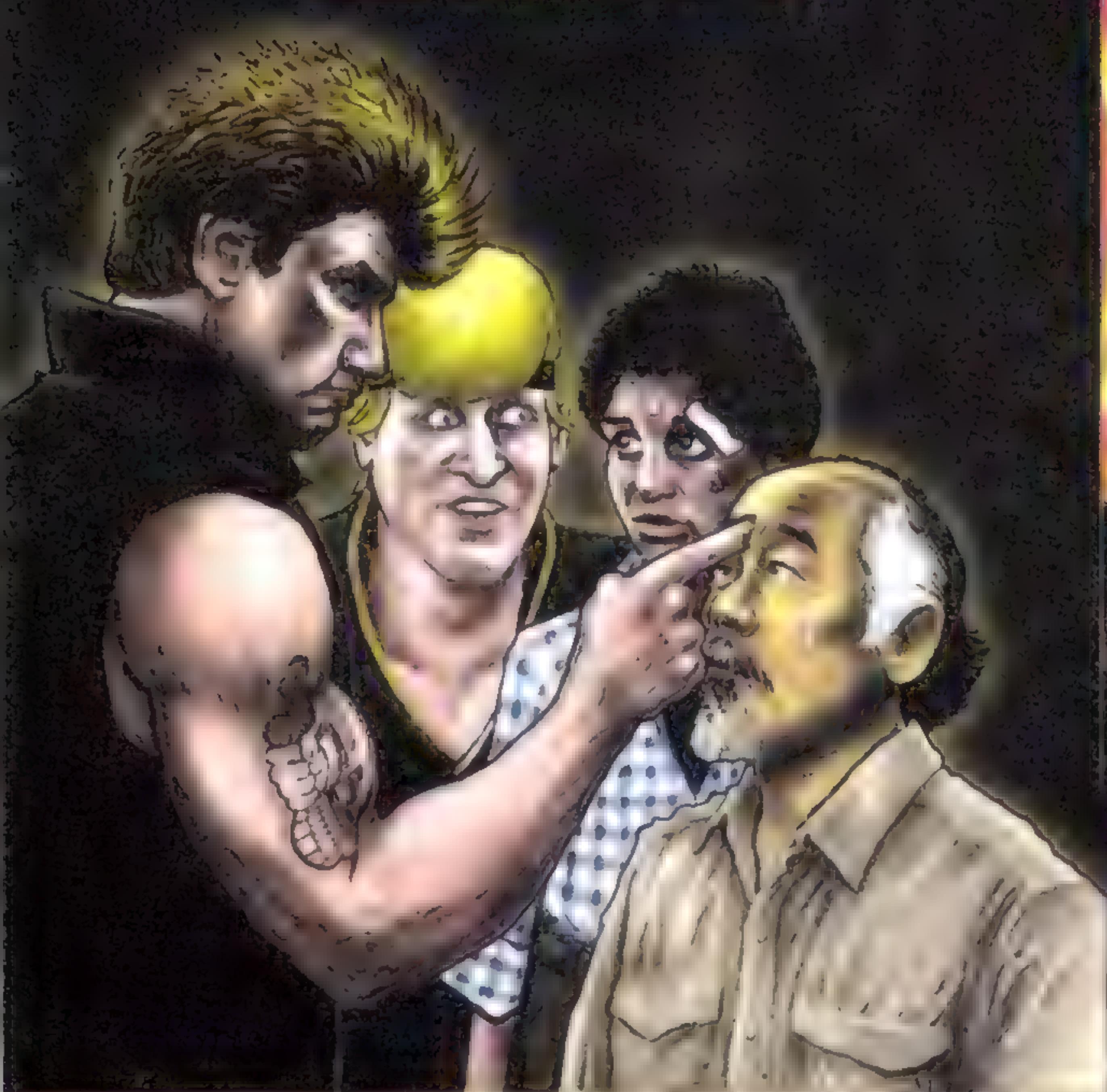
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HOW TO BUY STRINGS



» By Chris Gill

Strings are a guitar's lifeblood. The primary source of a guitar's sound, strings significantly influence the instrument's tone and intonation. A good set of strings can make your guitar come alive with bright and vibrant tone, while old, worn-out strings can cause even the most finely crafted vintage ax to sound flat, lifeless, and out-of-tune.

Players who think only of price when buying a set of replacement strings may be selling themselves short. Putting a cheap set of Rusty's Super Skanky strings on your guitar can be like putting retreads on a Porsche 911. Your guitar may sound okay, but it won't deliver its full potential.

Over the years string manufacturers have introduced dozens of custom-gauge sets to meet the increasingly specialized needs of today's players. But for the uninitiated guitarist, more choices means more questions. Should you choose light, regular or heavy gauge? Nickel-plated or stainless steel? Round-wound, half-round or flat-wound? What about coated strings?

According to D'Addario Brand Manager Brian Vance, D'Addario EXL110 strings are the best-selling electric guitar strings in the USA. "EXL110s are the most reliable workhorse and the best-sounding strings for most players," says Vance. "Over the years we've continued to expand our XL line, and we now offer 28 different gauges of XL strings for players."

"Regular"-gauge (.010 to .046 gauge) strings like D'Addario's EXL110s offer a good balance of tone and playability, and are a solid all-around starting choice for players who have yet to develop any particular preferences. Lighter gauge sets are easier to bend, but the tone, especially on the lower bass strings, can be significantly thinner. Players like Steve Vai and Joe Satriani tended to favor light strings during

the Eighties and Nineties because they make it easier to execute extreme note bends. Heavier sets have heavier tone, but the increased tension can make the strings very difficult to bend and more of a struggle to play.

As guitarists began experimenting with alternate tunings and tuning their guitars down one or even two whole steps to D or C, heavier strings became more popular. When tuned down, regular and light gauge strings can become too floppy and difficult to play in tune. Sets like Ernie Ball's Beefy Slinky and D'Addario's EXL145s are designed to provide the proper playing tension and intonation when a guitar is tuned down.

"More and more players are experimenting with custom sets," says Vance. "They want to know what gauge is best to use when they tune a string down to a certain note to maintain balanced tension for a set. D'Addario has a PDF on our website (daddariostrings.com) that provides a tension guide. If you want to tune your low E down to C but want to keep everything else the same, this guide will tell you what gauge strings you should use."

The materials from which the strings are made also significantly influence a guitar's tone. Nickel-plated steel and stainless steel are the most common wrap materials for electric guitar strings. DR offers strings featuring pure nickel wrap, similar to strings made in the Fifties and Sixties. Dean Markley's innovations include SLP strings,

which are made of nickel-iron alloy, and Blue Steel, which are treated with -320 degree liquid nitrogen to harden the strings for longer life and to provide brighter tone.

Nickel-plated steel strings are the most popular as they provide a good balance of lively tone, smooth feel and playability. Stainless-steel strings are more magnetic and offer hotter output in addition to brighter tone, but they tend to feel rougher under the fingers and can wear out a guitar's frets more quickly owing to the strings' increased hardness. Pure nickel-wrap strings are less magnetic and tend to sound mellower. "The preferred standard today is nickel-plated steel," says Vance. "The plating gives the smoothness and feel of nickel, but it has more brightness and volume than pure nickel."

Round-wound strings are vastly more popular than alternatives like half-round and flat-wound strings, but half- and flat-wounds are worth consideration if you're looking for something different. With their warm, mellow tone, flat-wound strings were long the preference of jazz guitarists, but they're also great for playing rockabilly, surf and other retro styles. Half-round strings start off as round-wounds, but the wrappings are ground to a smooth surface to provide a compromise between the smooth feel of a flat-wound string and the brighter tone of a round-wound. "Half-rounds are great for slide players who want less surface noise," says Vance. "They're also easier to bend than

flat-wounds, so they're a nice hybrid for blues-jazz players."

Coated strings have enjoyed increased popularity over the last ten years. Elixir was the first company to offer polymer-coated strings, but now almost every major string company—D'Addario, Dean Markley, Black Diamond, DR—offers their own sets of coated strings. The polymer coating keeps strings from oxidizing and collecting residues, allowing them to retain their brightness and "fresh" sound three to four times longer than ordinary strings. Coated strings are more costly, but they're ideal for players who don't want to change strings frequently.

"Coated strings are more of a lifestyle choice," says Vance. "They're for players who'd rather spend more time playing than changing strings. Players who were turned off by coated strings several years ago would be surprised how far the technology has come today. Most people have a hard time hearing or feeling the difference between coated and regular strings."

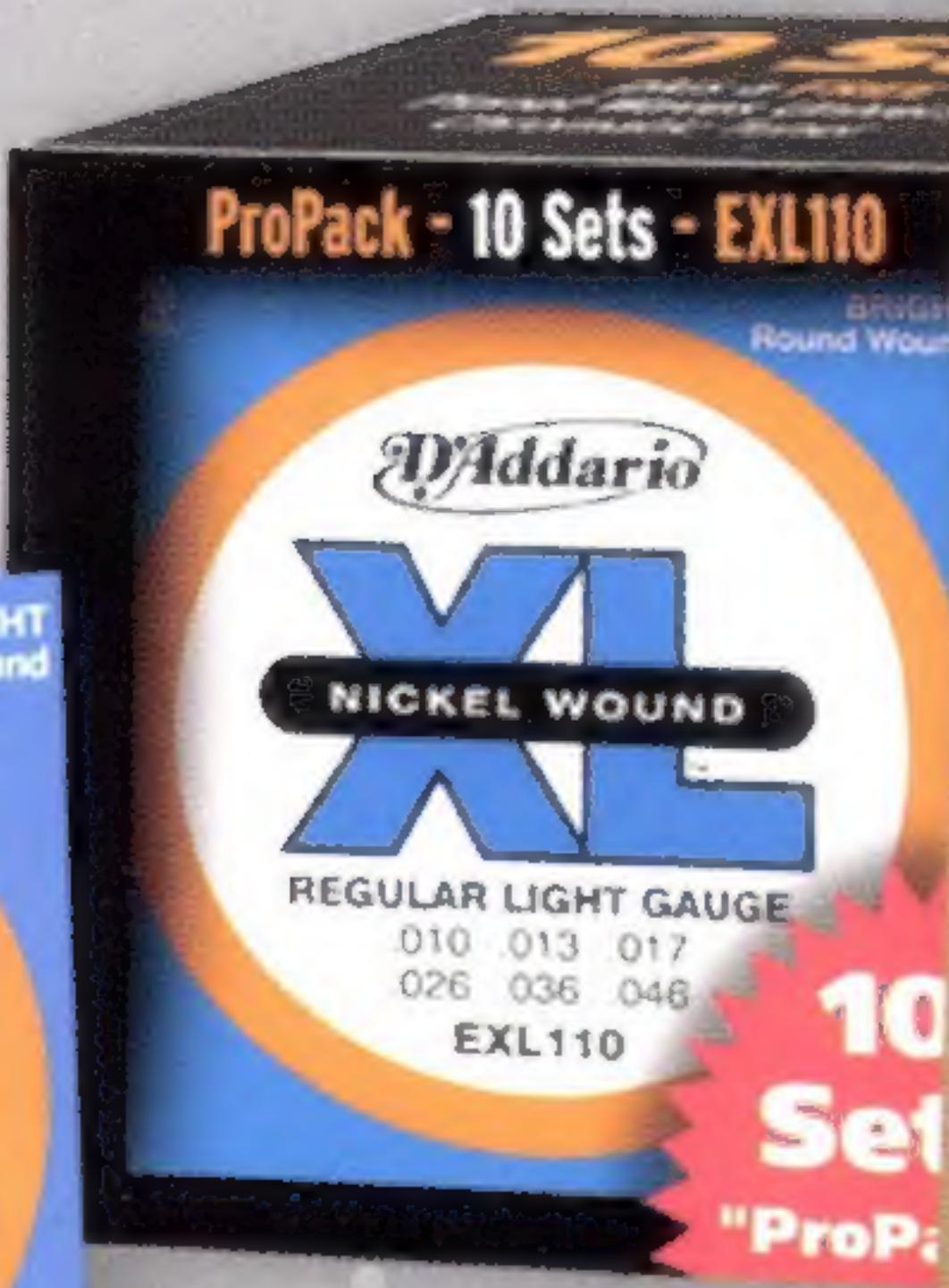
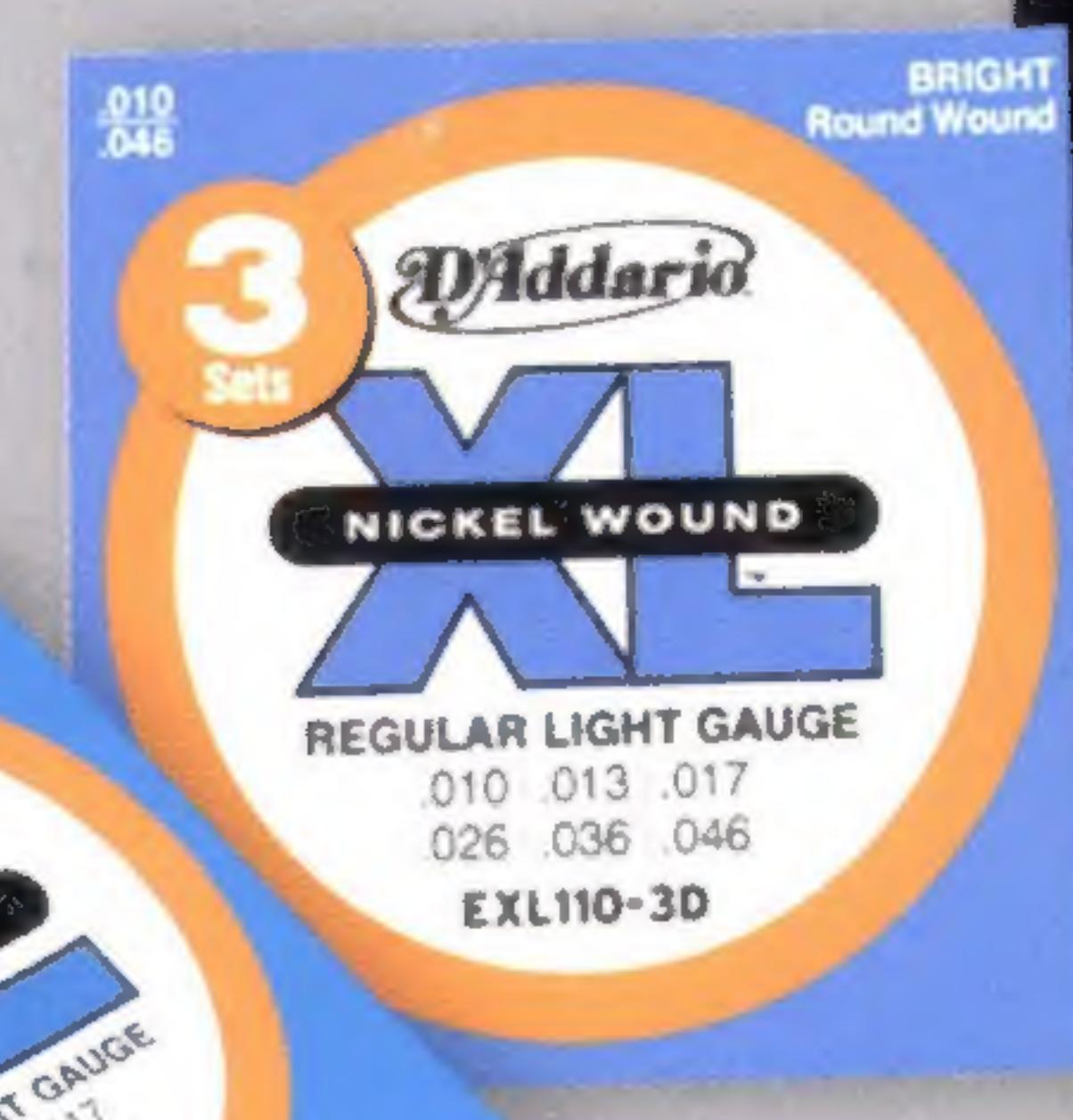
If you're not sure what strings are right for you, it may be time to start experimenting with the different choices available. Trying a new set of strings is the easiest way to change your guitar's tone, and with most strings costing between \$4 to \$12 a set, it's also inexpensive. Finding the properly matched strings for your sound and playing style can make your guitar seem like an entirely new instrument, and it's a lot cheaper than buying a new ax. ☀

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or slow mode

Record,
practice &
play

PLUG IN TO YOUR FAVORITE BAND

An integrated monitor + software system that extracts the guitar from any MP3 and plugs you into the music. Ever dream of replacing the guitarist on your favorite songs? With JamVOX™, you can mute the guitar track from any MP3 and jam along! Exclusive JamVOX GXT® technology makes it possible to practice, improvise and record your guitar performance, with any artists you choose as a backup band.

Drag-and-drop interface and automatic startup make JamVOX easy to use

Includes an essential collection of amp, cab, pedal and effect models



Powered stereo monitors deliver stageworthy sound right from your desktop

1/4", XLR and USB connectivity for instruments, mics and your computer



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